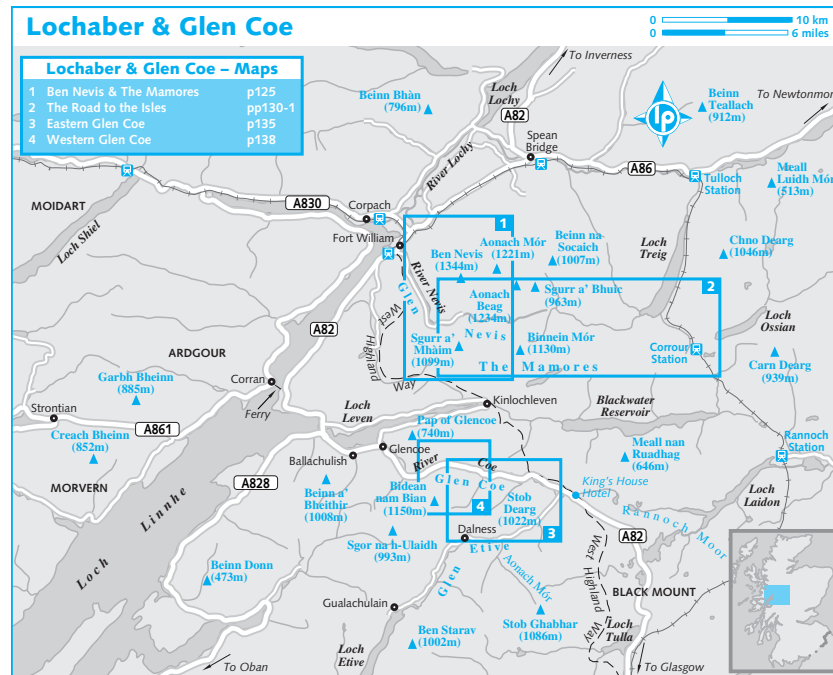


Lochaber & Glen Coe

The name Lochaber may not send out a particularly positive signal but if you link it to Glen Coe, it should soon become obvious that we're looking at some of the most spectacular mountain scenery and many of the finest walks in the country. The heartland of this area lies in Glen Coe and in Glen Nevis just next door, with the less known but little less impressive areas of Ardgour, Morvern and Moidart to the west across Loch Linnhe. As Britain's highest mountain, Ben Nevis is the biggest drawcard in more ways than one, and the curvaceous Mamores range dangles an irresistible temptation in the multiple-Munro Ring of Steall walk. At much lower levels, the historic Road to the Isles walk, following an ancient route used by cattle drovers, crosses some of the remotest country in the region. In Glen Coe the magnificent Bidean nam Bian massif and Buachaille Etive Mór, the spectacular guardian of the glen's eastern entrance, both provide memorable days out on their rugged ridges, though for a truly unforgettable experience, the fearsome Aonach Eagach ridge is without peer. Striking a gentler note, the Glen Coe & Glen Etive Circuit displays impressive evidence of the glen's icy geological history. The northern half of the West Highland Way, Scotland's most popular long-distance walk, finishes in fine style in Lochaber; you'll find a full description on p89. We're sure you'll agree that there are many more reasons than just Ben Nevis for Lochaber to be on your must-visit list.



CLIMATE

The Lochaber and Glen Coe region is one of the wettest areas in Scotland, with an average rainfall of 200cm in Fort William, increasing to more than 400cm on the summit of Ben Nevis. Lower, the proximity of the sea makes for a milder climate but conditions become increasingly severe with altitude; high winds and low cloud are common on the summits. Some years, patches of snow survive in sheltered corries on the region's higher peaks until late summer. The steepness of the glens can cause frequent temperature inversions, when the valley floors are bitten by hard frosts or shrouded in fog.

December and January are the wettest months, though rainfall during August (usually the busiest month) can match that in February. May is the driest and July the warmest month, when the low-level daily maximum averages 16°C.

INFORMATION Maps & Books

OS Travel – Road 1:250,000 map No 3 *Western Scotland* provides an overview of

the region. *Walks Fort William* by John and Tricia Wombell, in the excellent Hallowell series, describes 26 walks in the area. Nick Williams' *Central Highlands* Pocket guide covers the Glen Coe area, among others.

Information Sources

Outdoor Capital (www.outdoorcapital.co.uk) is an immensely rich lode of information about a huge range of outdoor activities.

For all public-transport timetable information, consult **Traveline Scotland** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.travelinescotland.com).

GATEWAY Fort William

Fort William, near the head of Loch Linnhe and famously in the shadow of Ben Nevis, 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, and is an unrivalled destination for walkers, climbers and all sorts of outdoor-sports enthusiasts.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Summitting **Ben Nevis** (p126), Britain's highest mountain
- Getting the adrenaline pumping on the exposed scramble along the **Aonach Eagach** (p139) ridge
- Exploring the hidden beauty of Nevis gorge and Steall Meadows on the **Ring of Steall** (p128) and **The Road to the Isles** (p129) walks
- Stealing through tragic Lost Valley on the way to the lofty ridge of **Bidean nam Bian** (p136)

■ www.visithighlands.co.uk

■ www.outdoorcapital.co.uk

HILLWALKERS & SCOTLAND'S GAELIC HERITAGE *Roddy Maclean*

Any map of the Highlands is covered with place names in or derived from Gaelic, the original Celtic language of the Scots. To English speakers, Gaelic might seem foreign, but study of the language reveals its critical place in the formation of the Scottish nation in the first millennium AD and the powerful relationship between the Gaelic-speaking people and their land over many centuries. This heritage is particularly well represented in the wild areas that provide the best walking. The landscape heritage is so strong that many Gaelic words associated with the environment have found their way into English, as it's used in Scotland. Examples include *beinn* (ben), *coire* (corrie), *gleann* (glen), *creag* (craig, crag) and *tàrmachan* (ptarmigan).

Given the relatively small areas of forest, it may be surprising to learn that the 18 letters of the Gaelic alphabet were originally named after trees. Tree names still pepper the landscape, recalling former woodlands – one relatively common example being *Allt Beithe* (birch burn). The oak tree (*darach*) was sacred to the pagan Celts and is still afforded a special place in Gaelic tradition; *Allt an Daraich* (burn of the oak) is in Torridon.

At least 42 different Gaelic words for hill, mountain or upland country appear on maps of Scotland, again revealing the richness of the language's relationship with the environment. A *sgùrr* is high and sharp-pointed on at least one side, a *meall* is usually much less shapely (and an easier climb!) and a *cnoc* is a hill of no great height that should provide a relatively straightforward excursion. The words *bealach* and *làirig* are also useful pointers for walkers; they represent passes through the hills, many of which have been used since prehistoric times and have great cultural significance.

INFORMATION

The **TIC** (☎ 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** (☎ 70493; 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; not surprisingly, 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 (p124).

Calluna (☎ 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 (☎ 701806; www.limetrestudio.co.uk; Achintore Rd; s/d £40/70) is, refreshingly,

more an art gallery with rooms than a conventional B&B, its walls decorated with the owners' Highland landscapes.

The **Grog & Gruel** (☎ 705078; 66 High St; mains £10-15; 🍷 lunch Mon-Sat, dinner daily) claims to offer the best range of Scottish real ales anywhere, including the wonderful ales from nearby Atlas Brewery in Kinlochleven. Match this with a pizza in the Alehouse, or steaks and seafood in the traditional pub-style restaurant.

Crannog Seafood Restaurant (☎ 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 marine menu includes local mussels and langoustines.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

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

First ScotRail (☎ 0845 755 0033; www.firstscotrail.com) operates the *Caledonian Sleeper* from London to Fort William (seat/sleeper £75/115, 13 hours, daily Sunday to Friday), and the service from Glasgow (£24, 3½ hours, three service Monday to Saturday, two Sunday). From Edinburgh (£35, five hours, three services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday), change at Glasgow Queen St.

Scottish Citylink (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) provides bus services from Glasgow (£15, three hours, three daily), Edinburgh (£21, four hours, three daily), Inverness (£10, two hours, five services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and Portree on the Isle of Skye (£18, three hours, three daily).

BEN NEVIS VIA THE MOUNTAIN TRACK

Duration	6–8 hours
Distance	9 miles (14.5km)
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre
Nearest Towns	Fort William (p121), Glen Nevis (p124)
Transport	bus

Summary A great feeling of camaraderie pervades the most famous climb in Britain, which is steep and unrelenting but worth every step for the finest bird's-eye view around.

Ben Nevis (1344m) is the highest mountain in Britain and attracts hordes of walkers and climbers. Like the highest peak in many countries, the Ben tempts visitors with barely any walking experience to have a go, and many discover they have taken on more than they expected. For reasons many and various, there are several mountain rescue call-outs on Ben Nevis each year.

The mountain is a compelling and alluring presence above Fort William, often capped in cloud and presenting 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 in which to stage your climb, to allow for the vagaries of the weather.

The climb starts almost at sea level and continues relentlessly all the way to the summit. The main route follows the Mountain Track, along the old bridle path. It's very well maintained as far as the junction near Halfway Lochan, from where it's rougher, crossing steep, rocky slopes. Conditions on the top can be extreme – mist envelops everything like a thick blanket, and strong winds gust and eddy about, making normal walking difficult. What's more, navigating safely past the deep, sheer-sided gullies that cut into the summit plateau very close to

the path is notoriously dangerous in poor visibility.

There are other walking, or at least non-climbing, routes up the Ben, of which the Carn Mór Dearg Arête (see the boxed text on p127), on its northern flanks, offers a certain amount of excitement along its slender spine, without being beyond the reach of anyone with some experience of scrambling and a reliable head for heights.

HISTORY

The Gaelic name Nibheis can be traced back to words meaning 'dread' and 'terrible'. The mountain first appeared on a map in 1654 with the name Bion Novesh, and by the early 1700s ascents were mentioned in literary records.

Much later, scientists in the Scottish Meteorological Society began to take an interest in the mountain. During the summers of 1881 and 1882, a member of the society, Clement Wragge (soon nicknamed 'the inclement rag'), climbed to the summit every day to take weather measurements. In 1883 a summit observatory was built, and was maintained until it closed in 1904. A bridle path, the origins of today's Mountain Track, was forged up the mountainside to supply the observatory, and a small hotel, little more than an annexe, materialised.

BEN NEVIS – AN EXTREME CLIMATE

As you might expect, 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 base of the mountain, and this figure does not allow for wind chill. 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 lulled into complacency, as the weather can turn arctic at any time. 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 what would be the permanent snow line. If the views are superb, the chances of seeing them are not – the summit, on average, is cloud-covered six days out of seven.

Two local women provided B&B at the hotel for 10 shillings (50p) a head until it closed in 1918.

The idea of a race up the mountain was originally intended as a distraction from the daily routine of life at the observatory. William Swan, a local tobacconist, made the first timed and recorded ascent in October 1895, taking two hours 41 minutes for the return trip from Fort William. The race soon captured public imagination and became an institution, the **Ben Nevis Race** (www.bennevisrace.co.uk). These days, as many as 500 people enter the annual 'Ben Race' on the first Saturday of September. By 2006 the records stood at one hour 25 minutes for men and one hour 43 minutes for women, both set way back in 1984.

The Ben Nevis Estate was put on the market in 1999, and the John Muir Trust (JMT; p31) snapped up the property for approximately £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 sustainable environmental and visitor management of the Ben Nevis massif and Glen Nevis, in particular footpath repair projects. Aware that, in many people's eyes, the Ben's summit had become the highest rubbish tip in Britain, the JMT has organised several clean-up days; on one, the remains of a grand piano

were found beneath a cairn. It turned out that it had once been carried up the mountain to raise funds for charity. The summit also became a popular place for leaving mementos of people who had come to grief on the mountain (and elsewhere), a practice that proved to be highly controversial, with many walkers and climbers believing that the mountain was being desecrated. In response, the JMT opened a Garden of Remembrance near the visitor centre (in August 2006) where the many and various memorials placed on the summit over the years were brought together.

PLANNING

When to Walk

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

What to Bring

Carry plenty of warm and waterproof clothing – protection for your head and hands is particularly important – and a copy of the bearings needed to descend safely, as given in the boxed text, left.

Maps & Books

The walk is covered by OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 41 *Ben Nevis*, OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 392 *Ben Nevis & Fort William* and two Harvey maps: 1:25,000 *Superwalker Ben Nevis* and 1:12,500 *Summit Ben Nevis*. Local leaflets covering this route include *Ben Nevis – walking the path from June to September*, produced by the ranger service, and *Great Walks No 2* by Fort William and Lochaber Tourism.

Guided Walks

The JMT organises walks in the area; contact the **Nevis Conservation Officer** (☎ 705049) or the Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre (p126) for details.

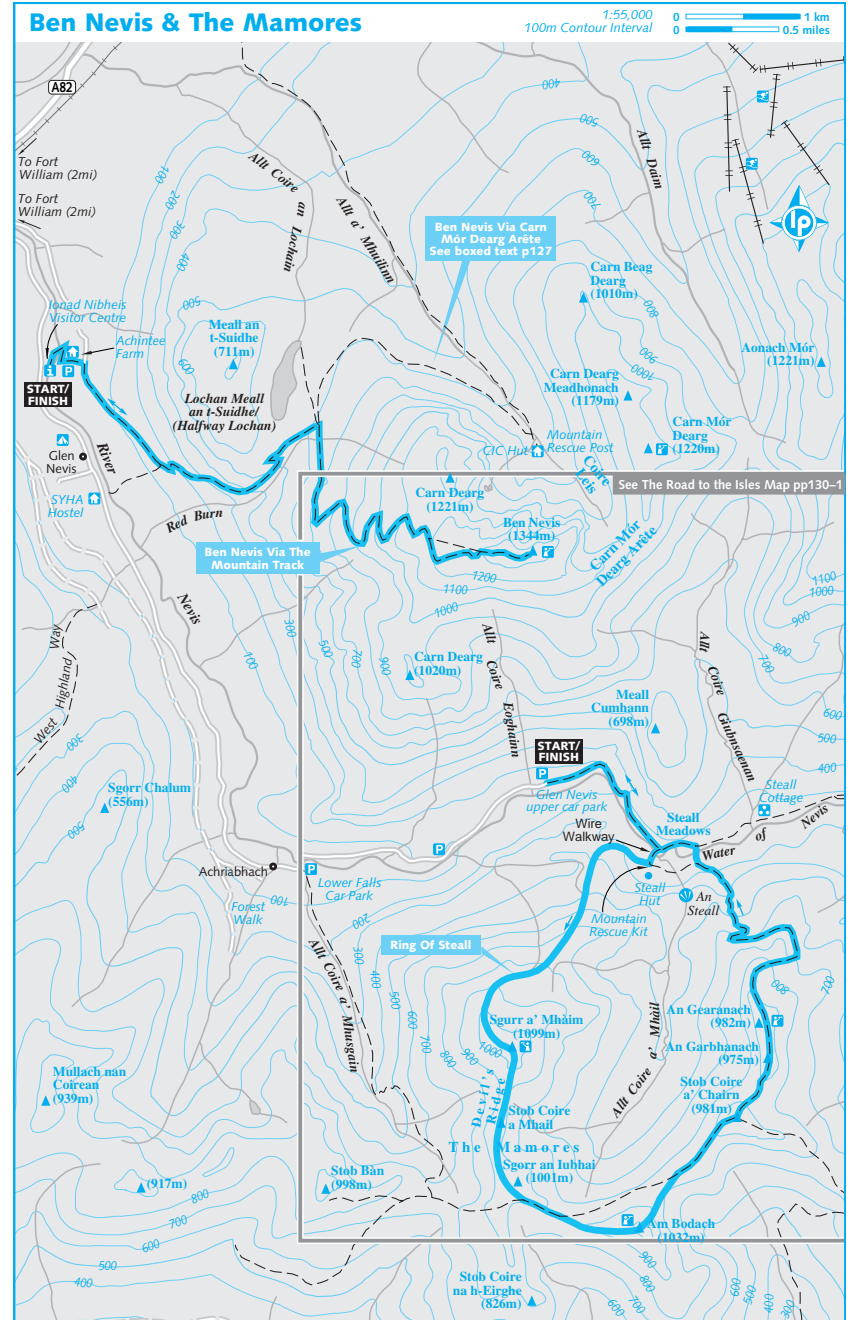
NEAREST TOWNS

See Fort William (p121).

Glen Nevis

☎ 01397

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



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 (count your paces – 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. Remember to allow for magnetic variation – this 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 visitor centre at the start of the walk.

INFORMATION

Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre (☎ 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 at the centre and also at the SYHA hostel (below) in Glen Nevis. A voluntary fee is requested for use of the adjacent car park.

SLEEPING & EATING

Glen Nevis Caravan & Camping Park (☎ 702191; www.glennevis.co.uk; unpowered/powerd sites for two £10/12.50) 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 range of rooms and dorms, and is ideally located for the Ben.

Achintee Farm (☎ 702240; www.achinteefarm.com; dm/d £11/13, B&B d £60) 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 (☎ 703601; mains £6; 📍 lunch & dinner) offers pretty basic but inexpensive fare.

Glen Nevis Restaurant & Bar (☎ 705459; bar mains £9-15, restaurant mains £10-18; 📍 lunch & dinner) does standard bar meals, leavened with daily specials; the restaurant is more imaginative.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Highland Country Buses (☎ 01463 710555; www.rapsons.com) operates a service between Fort William and Glen Nevis (£2, 20 minutes, eight services Monday to Saturday, four Sunday).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

There are three possible starting points. By car from Fort William, head north along the A82; turn off along the road to Claggan Industrial Estate then follow signs to Achintee Farm. There's a car park at the end of the road. 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.

In Glen Nevis, you can park at Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre, 1.5 miles from Fort William. Alternatively, it is possible to join the path via a side track that begins opposite the SYHA Hostel in Glen Nevis – the two paths meet at a small plantation above the hostel. The Highland Country Buses service between Fort William and Glen Nevis pass the centre and drivers may stop if requested.

THE WALK

From the Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre take the signed 'Ben Nevis Path' and cross the suspension bridge. Follow the river bank upstream and then turn left, following a stone wall to reach the Ben Nevis Path (Mountain Track), where the climb begins in earnest. You gain height steadily on a good path, crossing a couple of footbridges. After about 40 minutes, the path turns into Red Burn glen. As the gradient begins to ease a little, the path zigzags sharply and then levels out as **Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe** (also known as Halfway Lochan) comes into view.

Above the lochan the path turns right at a junction – the Classic Walk (opposite) diverges here. This is a good place to take stock. Is the weather fit to continue? Are you fit to continue? From here to the top and back will take you around three to five hours. If you're in any doubt, just enjoy the view and go back down.

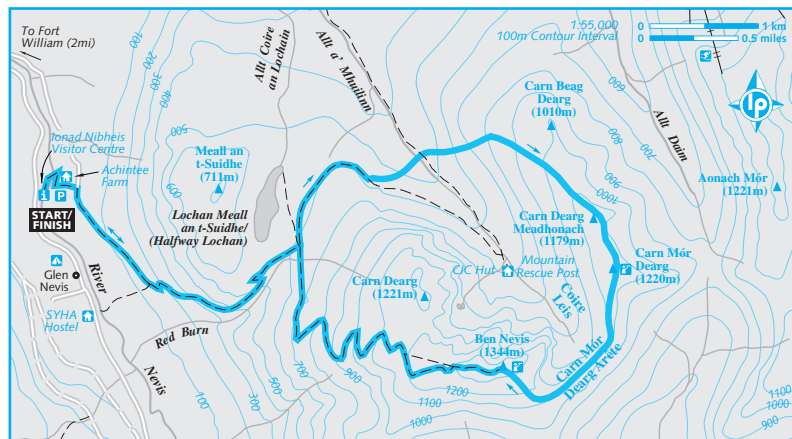
Continuing on, you soon cross Red Burn. Halfway House, which was used in association with the summit observatory, once stood near here. In days gone by, walkers were charged one shilling (5p) for walking to the summit, the proceeds being used for path maintenance. The path zigzags steeply up across stony slopes and eventually the gradient eases at around 1200m; here 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 particularly clear of any patches of snow. In poor visibility, once you've reached the summit cairn atop **Ben Nevis** don't lose sight of it until you are ready to descend.

Map p125**CLASSIC WALK – CARN MÓR DEARG ARÈTE**

The connoisseur's route up Ben Nevis is via Carn Mór Dearg Arête, a tough walk involving a thrilling rock ridge; the views throughout are superb. Allow eight to nine hours for the very demanding 9.5-mile (15km) walk, involving 1660m ascent. It starts and finishes at the Ionad Nibheis Visitor Centre (opposite) in Glen Nevis and makes a horseshoe circuit of the Ben Nevis massif, approaching from the satellite peak of Carn Mór Dearg to the northeast. The two peaks are linked by a wonderful narrow rock-ridge, Carn Mór Dearg Arête, the traverse of which provides the highlight of the day.

The walk is covered by OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 392 *Ben Nevis* and Harvey's 1:12,500 Summit map *Ben Nevis* and its Superwalker 1:25,000 *Glen Coe*.

Follow the Ben Nevis via the Mountain Track description (p123) to Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe. From a junction above the lochan, follow a well-made path leading north. Several minutes along, turn right onto a narrower path, which is rougher than the virtual highway you've been following so far and has a few potentially boggy spots. It contours the steep slope below the Ben's western cliffs then swings round into the long, deep glen carved by Allt a' Mhuilinn and leads to the CIC Hut at the head of the glen, marked out by a small wind pump. You could walk right up to the hut but it's quicker to drop down to the stream and climb the slopes of Carn Beag Dearg. A well-marked path traverses below its summit, and leads to the summit of Carn Dearg Meadhonach (1179m). Press on over a slight dip to Carn Mór Dearg. From here the ridge narrows and descends slightly to the beginning of the Carn Mór Dearg Arête. The drop to either side of the fairly easy scramble is steep; an easier path, mostly on the left, avoids some of the exposure. Beyond a subsidiary top, the ridge rises to meet the eastern flanks of Ben Nevis. A worn path then zigzags for 300m up the steep, rocky slope to the rounded summit plateau. Make sure you have a note of the bearings needed to descend safely from Ben Nevis (see the boxed text on p124) then descend along the Mountain Track (p123).



The summit isn't perhaps the most scenic of places, containing the remains of the substantial walls of the observatory, several cairns and the trig point amid the boulder-strewn moonscape. But 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.

The return is 'simply' a matter of retracing 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 boxed text on p124 to reach the top of the path. Take care once you're on the path – most accidents occur during the descent.

RING OF STEALL

Duration	7–8 hours
Distance	8.5 miles (13.5km)
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Glen Nevis upper car park
Nearest Towns	Fort William (p121), Glen Nevis (p124)
Transport	private
Summary	A challenging circuit, with a knife-edged ridge, which increases your Munros 'bag' by four and provides views of mountains galore.

The Mamores is a shapely mountain range in an incredible location, though easily overlooked in favour of Ben Nevis and the more famous peaks of Glen Coe, especially if you're not in hot pursuit of all the Munros in the area. The name almost certainly comes directly from the Gaelic *mám mór* meaning big, breast-shaped hills – as always with Gaelic names, a concise and apt description.

The route described is the best circuit the Mamores has to offer, featuring several Munros, a crossing of the Devil's Ridge and an approach through the beautiful, mini-Himalayan Nevis gorge. Such variety of scenery and situations in the space of a single day is very special, and a sense of satisfaction at the end of the day is guaranteed. It's a strenuous day with a total ascent of around 1500m.

Alternatives Although the terrain is steep, there are several escape routes into Coire a' Mhàil, in the centre of the circuit, after passing Sgorr an Iubhai.

PLANNING

When to Walk

This walk is generally accessible throughout summer, although fine, dry and settled weather is pretty well essential. The path through the Water of Nevis gorge crosses rocky ground and can be treacherous when icy, though this is unlikely during summer.

If the Water of Nevis is in spate, which is possible at any time, you'll have no choice but to cross on a wire walkway consisting of two thick strands of wire with small footplates and shoulder-high 'hand rails',

for which balance and sure-footedness are more important than a head for heights.

High winds will make the crossing of Devil's Ridge dangerous.

Maps

The walk is covered by OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 392 *Ben Nevis* and Harvey's Super-walker 1:25,000 map *Glen Coe*.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

A **Highland Country Buses** (☎ 01463 710555; www.rapsons.com) seasonal service from Fort William goes up to the Glen Nevis Lower Falls car park (£2.50, 15 minutes, eight services Monday to Saturday, three Sunday), 1.5 miles (2.5km) downhill from the upper car park at the start and finish of this walk.

If you don't make the last bus, you'll have to walk either 4 miles to Glen Nevis village or 6 miles to Fort William. There's a track through the forest starting at Achriabhach, about 250m west of where the road crosses to the other side of the river. Alternatively, you can leave the road in places to follow the river bank along informal paths.

THE WALK

Map p125

From the parking area follow the obvious path winding through the trees high above the turbulent Water of Nevis. Higher up, the path runs along the edge of the river above steep drops, and the huge boulders and swirling rock features carved by the water are very impressive.

From the far end of the gorge, another wonderful sight opens up – the flat plateau of **Steall Meadows**. Steall means 'waterfall' and the area takes its name from An Steall, the 100m-high cascade that pours down slabs in the southeast corner of the plateau. Steall Hut (private) sits on the opposite bank. You need to cross the river here, either by braving the wire walkway or, if the river is low, by splashing through the shallows slightly upstream. From Steall Hut head west through long grass, soon skirting a thicket of trees. Gain the northeast shoulder of Sgurr a' Mhàim and veer to the south, climbing between craggy outcrops on the ridge. You will soon pick up a path that leads up the shoulder to a scree-filled corrie, where a well-worn path leads onto the northwest ridge and the summit of **Sgurr a' Mhàim** (1099m), 3½ to four hours from the

THE WEST HIGHLAND RAILWAY

The West Highland Railway runs between Glasgow, Fort William and Mallaig, passing through some of Scotland's most wild and spectacular mountain scenery. Stations such as Arrochar & Tarbet, Crianlarch, Bridge of Orchy and Spean Bridge allow you to 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, have a good walk, then catch the train from another station up or down the line.

Possibly the most intriguing place to get off is at Corroul, which, at 408m above sea level and 11 miles from the nearest road, is the highest and most remote station in Britain. From Corroul there are plenty of peaks to climb and remote valleys to explore, including the Road to Isles (below) walk described here.

Work on the line began in 1889 and 5000 men were employed to build it, laying foundations of brushwood 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.

Beyond Fort William the train runs through the rugged country around Glenfinnan and on to Mallaig, from where it's a short ferry ride to the Isle of Skye.

start. The view across to Ben Nevis is hard to beat and, ahead, the horseshoe of peaks you are about to cross should be visible.

From Sgurr a' Mhàim the path drops down to a saddle, and meets the fearsomely named **Devil's Ridge**. The ridge is very narrow and airy in places, with considerable exposure, but easily negotiable by using your hands here and there. It leads up to Stob Coire a' Mhàil, where the ridge broadens. Drop down to a saddle and then climb once again to reach the flat summit of **Sgorr an Iubhai** (1001m); the Gaelic name means 'peak of the yew tree', which grows wild in the area.

From Sgorr an Iubhai descend to a col, ignoring a path that contours around Am Bodach's northwestern slopes, and climb the rocky slope to the **Am Bodach** (1032m) summit. There are fine views to the south over Loch Leven, and most of the Mamores should be visible. A steep path now heads down the northeast ridge, weaving its way between boulders and stones. The path is well worn for the rest of the route. Cross Stob Coire a' Chairn (where the main spine of the Mamores range heads east), descend slightly then climb steeply, possibly using your hands in places, to **An Garbhanach** (975m). Between here and An Gearanach, the last summit, the ridge narrows briefly to a knife-edge; from **An Gearanach** (982m) follow the path steeply down to Steall Meadows.

At the bottom, swing round to the west, clambering over rocks and tree roots to avoid the many wet, boggy sections of the path. The lower reaches of this path are badly

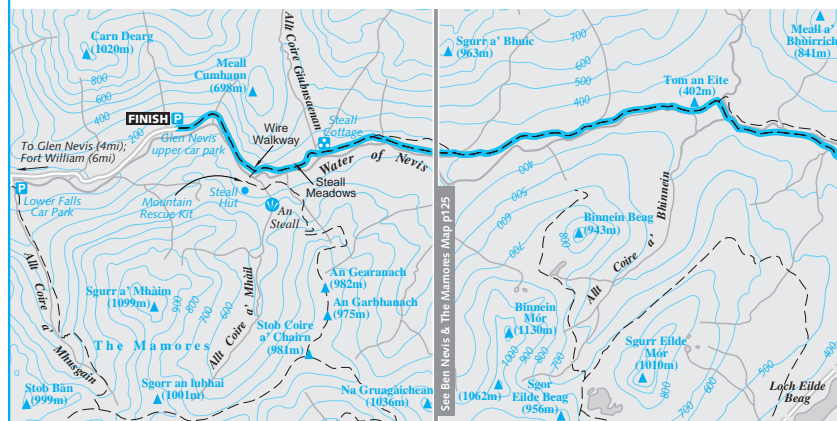
eroded and some parts have been swept away by small landslips. Take great care here, but once past the tumbling cascade of An Steall, any difficulties are behind you. Recross the Water of Nevis and follow the path back to the Glen Nevis upper car park.

THE ROAD TO THE ISLES

Duration	6–8 hours
Distance	14.5 miles (23km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Corroul (p130)
Finish	Glen Nevis upper car park
Nearest Towns	Glen Nevis (p124), Fort William (p121)
Transport	train, bus
Summary	A long and remote low-level walk 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 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 much used by cattle drovers heading for the cattle trysts (fairs) at Crieff and Falkirk. Armies, their quarries and refugees have also marched and fled along the route.

The Road To The Isles



The walk starts at Corrou station, 11 miles from the nearest public road, in the heart of Rannoch Moor. The route then follows a right of way to Glen Nevis, past the southern shores of Loch Treig, across wide, grassy, treeless moorland backed by comparatively low 'hills'. Once you cross the watershed, the scenery becomes much more dramatic, as the lightly wooded glen narrows right down to a small gorge, the spiky Mamores ridge soaring steeply to the south, and mighty Ben Nevis and the rugged Grey Corries towering 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.

Although the route can be done in either direction, there's more downhill in the direction described.

PLANNING

When to Walk/Stalking

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

Maps

The route is covered by OS Explorer 1:25,000 maps No 392 *Ben Nevis & Fort William* and No 385 *Rannoch Moor & Ben Alder*, and OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 41 *Ben Nevis*.

NEAREST TOWNS

See Glen Nevis (p124) and Fort William (p121).

Corrou

Corrou 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.

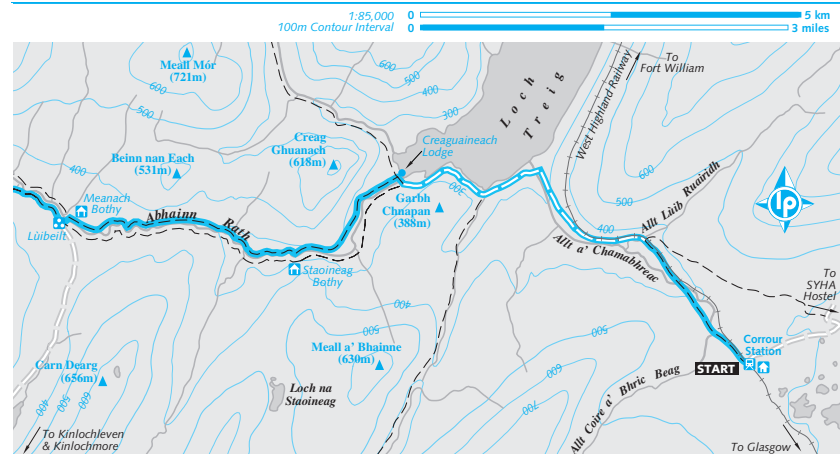
SLEEPING & EATING

Corrou Station House B&B & Restaurant (☎ 01397 732236; www.corrou.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 reopen the refurbished bunkhouse in 2007.

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

GETTING THERE & AWAY

First ScotRail (☎ 0845 755 0033; www.firstscotrail.com) trains from Glasgow (£17, three hours) and Fort William (£6, 50 minutes) stop at Corrou. There are four trains Monday to Saturday, and two Sunday. First ScotRail's *Caledonian Sleeper* service from London stops here on request (seat/sleeper £80/130, 11½ hours, daily service Sunday to Friday).



The platform at Corrou 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

For transport information from the finish, see p128.

THE WALK

From Corrou station on a clear day you can actually see 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 Lüib Ruairidh and join a wide, firm vehicle track linking Loch Ossian 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 smelter's power station. The last thing you'd expect to see out here is a house, but **Creaguineach Lodge**, at the loch's southwest

corner, just survived Treig's enlargement. Before you reach the lodge, you need to decide whether to continue along the northern side of the stream, 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 west – only a problem if it's in spate.

Choose the northern route and cross the substantial bridge over the burn (1¼ hours

CATTLE DROVING

The Road to the Isles is a famous route used by drovers on their way from the north to Tyndrum, 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 get to the mainland in the first place (as from the Isle of Skye), and then crossing mountain passes and traversing remote glens – passed through Tyndrum on their way to the 'trysts' (cattle markets) at Crieff or Falkirk, northeast of Glasgow.

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

from Allt Lùib Ruairidh). The intermittently rocky path wanders along at varying distances from the stream, shaded in places by clumps of beech and birch. About 30 minutes from Loch Treig, pass Staoineag Bothy on the opposite bank, easily reached by a line of stepping stones. The glen here is wide and grassy; within 1 mile it pinches in 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** (50 minutes from Staoineag) 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 track leads west from the bothy to a 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 fades. The easiest going is close to the stream. About 40 minutes from Meanach, cross Allt Coire a' Bhinnein and head north along the western side of Allt Coire Rath for a couple of hundred metres to pick up a path leading generally westwards. 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 is generally easy to follow, and 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 descend towards Glen Nevis, many more fine peaks of the Mamores come into sight and there's a dramatic view of Ben Nevis' northeast profile. Eventually you reach a substantial footbridge over a burn, beside the ruins of Steall Cottage (1¼ hours from Tom an Eite). You'll soon discover the origin of the cottage's name, on the far side of the Water of Nevis: the beautiful **An Steall** waterfall, a skein of long cascades down more than 100m of rock

slabs. There are usually plenty of people about, 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 makes 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 left there's one last excellent view back up the dramatic gorge to An Steall. The path brings you out at the Glen Nevis upper car park (40 minutes from Steall Cottage). Unless you've been able to arrange a lift, it's another 1.5 miles (2.5km) down the road to the bus stop at the lower car park.

GLEN COE

Glen Coe is among the most popular destinations for walkers and climbers in Scotland. It is one of the most dramatic valleys in the country, and most visitors approach Glen Coe from the east, on the A82. From that direction you descend off Rannoch Moor, pass the pyramidal sentinel of Buachaille Etive Mòr, and drop into the narrow Pass of Glencoe, a notch between Am Bodach (at the eastern end of Aonach Eagach) and Beinn Fhada. Ahead, 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 the Aonach Eagach ridge are so steep that you must crane your neck to see the top. To the south, the massive, jutting buttresses known as the Three Sisters throw shadows across the valley. Partially 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!

Glen Coe was among the National Trust for Scotland's (NTS) early land acquisitions. In 1935 Aonach Eagach and Signal Rock were purchased, and two years later the mountains on the south side of the valley were donated to the NTS. The estate now covers approximately 14,000 acres. The Trust's mandate is simple: to protect the natural and cultural heritage of the area and to ensure open access for walkers (and climbers).

ENVIRONMENT

The event that makes Glen Coe geologically significant 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 at Glen Coe marked an important development in geological knowledge. A small quarry near 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. The Lost Valley (see p137) between Gairr Aonach and Beinn Fhada is a good example of a hanging valley, formed when a higher glacier is cut off in its downhill journey by a larger glacier in the valley below. The Lairig Gartain and Lairig Eilde valleys (see p136) are classic U-shaped glacial valleys.

PLANNING Maps & Books

All the walks in Glen Coe are covered by OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 41 *Ben Nevis*, OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 384 *Glen Coe* and Harvey's 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.

Information Sources

A site sponsored by a local inn, www.glencoe-scotland.co.uk, is particularly useful for background information and links to use-

ful sites, including transport and mountain weather forecasts.

ACCESS TOWN Glencoe

☎ 01855 / 360

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

INFORMATION

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

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

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

SLEEPING & EATING

Red Squirrel Campsite (☎ 811256; www.redsquirrelcampsite.com; Leacantium Farm; unpowered sites for two £7), beside the River Coe, offers the rare

SHORT WALK

Part-hidden by tall forest, just north of Glencoe village, **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 forest, owned and managed by the Forestry Commission, make for a pleasant, 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 views of peaks in western Glen Coe, and in Morvern and Ardour across Loch Linnhe. Soon descend steeply to a junction and turn right to follow the lochan 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's scarcely necessary for this stroll, the OS Landranger 1:50,000 No 41 would be useful for orientation from the lookout.

opportunity to sit around the perfect midge repellent – a campfire.

Glencoe SYHA Hostel (☎ 0870 004 1122; www.syha.org.uk; dm £14; 📍), about 1.5 miles from the village, has largish dorms.

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

Clachaig Inn (☎ 811252; www.clachaig.com; s/d £38/42; bar meal mains £9-15) is 2.5 miles west of the village. The inn really comes into its own during the evening, when most outdoor people in the area congregate in the climbers' bar. The selection of real ales, to wash down the very generous meals, is bewilderingly wide and all too tempting (including the local Atlas Brewery's ales from Kinlochleven); there's the added attraction of regular live music.

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 (£14, 2½ hours, three daily) and Fort William (£5, 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 (£5, 40 minutes, at least seven services Monday to Saturday, three Sunday).

BUACHAILLE ETIVE MÓR

Duration	5–6 hours
Distance	6.5 miles (10.5km)
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Altnafeadh
Nearest Town	Glencoe (p133)
Transport	bus

Summary A classic exploration of the ridges and peaks of the most commanding mountain in Glen Coe.

Standing sentinel at the head of Glen Coe, Buachaille Etive Mór, meaning 'big herdsman of Etive', is one of the most distinctive landmarks in the Scottish landscape. At first sight, from the east on the A82 or from the start of the walk at Altnafeadh, it's

a daunting, seemingly impregnable pyramid of buttresses and chasm-like gullies. But looks are often deceiving and Coire na Tulaich provides a steep but reasonably straightforward ascent.

The summit is commonly called Buachaille Etive Mór but, strictly speaking, is Stob Dearg (1022m). From there a high-level ridge extends southwest, linking three more summits; the name Buachaille Etive Mór properly refers to this entire massif. With deep valleys on either side, the views and the feeling of space from the ridge and summits are exceptional. The walk along the ridge above Coire na Tulaich is quite easy with only a few short ascents to reach the summits. The route described here continues along the ridge across Stob na Doire and then descends into Lairig Gartain via Coire Altruim, giving a total ascent of 1080m.

Alternative For a shorter walk, you can simply return down Coire na Tulaich after bagging Stob Dearg; allow three to four hours.

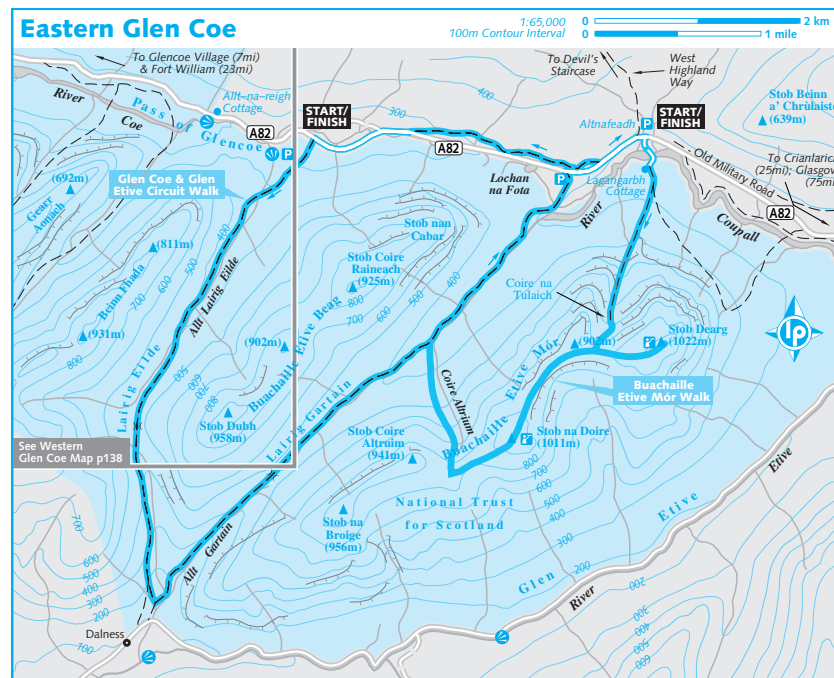
GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts and finishes at the Altnafeadh parking area on the A82. Buses operating along the A82 (see left) should stop here if requested in advance.

THE WALK

From Altnafeadh car park, follow the wide 4WD track to a large footbridge and then set out along a good path past Lagangarbh Cottage. Continue gently upwards into Coire na Tulaich and ignore a path going off to the left – this leads to the many scrambles and rock climbs on the buttresses further east. Follow the path along the right bank of the Allt Coire na Tulaich, which in all likelihood will be dry in summer.

As you get higher up, the ground on both sides steadily becomes steeper and the stream bed is gradually choked with boulders. The path climbs up to the right, on to easier ground heading towards the scree slopes up above. Once you are actually on the scree, stick to the righthand side, where a well-constructed path leads you to the top of some small rocky outcrops below the rim of Coire na Tulaich.



Following that, it is only a short scramble to the top, where you emerge somewhat suddenly on the ridge between Stob Dearg and Stob na Doire (around 1½ hours from the start).

Turn east and climb steadily for about 20 minutes over stony, frost-shattered ground to the summit of **Stob Dearg** (1022m). There are fine views to the east across exposed Rannoch Moor, and to the north and northwest across the shapely summits of the Mamores as far as 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 next on the agenda.

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 the grassy hummocks. Around 10 or 15 minutes of walking on this ridge should see you reach the base of the short, steep haul to **Stob na Doire** (1011m). A well-defined path clearly shows the way to the small summit cairn. The views over to the

west across Bidean nam Bian dominate here, and there is also an excellent vista south into Glen Etive.

The Buachaille Etive Mór ridge continues southwest to Stob na Broige, while immediately below, in a col, you can make out the red erosion scar of a path heading down into Coire Altruim. Descend steeply to the col; from here you can take the option of extending the walk out to Stob na Broige, where there are some great views of Loch Etive.

From the col, the descent into Coire Altruim is steep but straightforward, except for a few wet and rocky steps towards the bottom, where a little extra care should be taken. 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 that you used at the start of the walk. If the river is low, cross and follow the well-defined but boggy path that takes you to the A82 just a few hundred metres west of Altnafeadh (around one hour from the river crossing).

GLEN COE & GLEN ETIVE CIRCUIT

Duration	5 hours
Distance	10 miles (16km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Pass of Glencoe
Nearest Town	Glencoe (p133)
Transport	private
Summary	A low-level walk across two dramatic passes in magnificent glaciated valleys overlooked by rugged peaks and ridges.

This walk circumnavigates the base of Buachaille Etive Beag, the 'little shepherd of Etive', passing through Lairig Eilde and Lairig Gartain, two classic U-shaped glacial valleys. It's a taster of the wilder reaches of Glen Coe's dramatic mountain scenery, but without any really serious terrain. There's a catch though – the paths are mostly rough and rocky or, beside the River Coupall, very muddy. The route is described in an anti-clockwise direction for aesthetic reasons, though there is no reason why it can't be walked in the opposite direction. The walk includes more than 600m of ascent.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts and finishes at a car park beside the A82, immediately east of the Pass of Glencoe.

THE WALK

Map p135

At the car park a Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society sign points to Loch Etive-side. With excellent views across Glen Coe to the spiky, precipitous ridge of Aonach Eagach, the path leads southwest up to Allt Lairig Eilde. If the river is in spate it is dangerous to cross, and even in average conditions it can be difficult so, if in doubt, continue along the east bank until you re-join the path higher up. On the other side of Allt Lairig Eilde, the well-defined path continues for around 1 mile then crosses back to the east bank. The way, marked by a few cairns, now leads up, bending round to the south, with views of increasingly wild country – the jagged ridges of Stob Coire Sgreabhach to the west with rocky gorges below. You might be lucky and see red deer here. When you eventually reach the top of Lairig Eilde (489m) the views open up across Glen Etive to the mountains beyond.

Descend from the top of the pass and cross a small stream. The path continues steeply down towards Dalness in Glen Etive. After about 0.6 miles go through a gate in a high fence and cross the stream on rock slabs. Bear left, uphill and go through another gate. Traverse the spur briefly then pick up a formed path leading northeast across the lower slopes of Stob Dubh. A few hundred metres further on, join a path coming up from the right. Continue up the steep and fairly narrow valley, with Allt Gartain tumbling down it in a series of small waterfalls. The route up involves some easy scrambling in places, and on a fine day there are many opportunities to stop beside the waterfalls and enjoy the views back down to Loch Etive.

Soon you reach Lairig Gartain (489m), with extensive views ahead to the mountains around Loch Treig and one last look back to Loch Etive. The next stage of the walk, down another classic, U-shaped glaciated valley is boggy and wet. The eroded path along the northwest bank of the River Coupall can be muddy and somewhat treacherous. Walk down the glen, between Buachaille Etive Beag on the left and Buachaille Etive Mór on the right, to a car park beside the A82. Cross the road and follow a path that leads to an old road; turn left to follow it west for about 1 mile to where it meets the A82. Then you've little choice but to walk beside the road for several hundred metres, back to the car park at the start of the walk.

BIDEAN NAM BIAN

Duration	6–7 hours
Distance	6 miles (9.5km)
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	parking area west of Allt-na-reigh Cottage
Nearest Town	Glencoe (p133)
Transport	bus
Summary	From the beautiful and atmospheric Lost Valley, tackle a stunning circuit of a rugged mountain massif with wonderful views.

The ascent of Bidean nam Bian, which at 1150m is the highest mountain in Argyll, is one of the Glen Coe classics. The route squeezes up and down the steep-sided valleys that divide the Three Sisters, the

GLEN COE MASSACRE

The history of Glen Coe is stained by a massacre that happened in the valley in 1692. King William III extended an olive branch to rebellious Highland clans by offering pardons for their participation in a recent Jacobite uprising, provided they swore an oath of allegiance in front of a magistrate before 1 January 1692. Eventually, some chiefs did comply, but Alastair Maclain, 12th Chief of Glencoe (and head of a sept of the Clan MacDonald) left it to the very last minute. Fatefully, he was turned away by the governor in Fort William and sent south to Inveraray, with assurances for his safety. Although he was unable to swear until 6 January, both sides were satisfied that he had complied.

However, some people in high places saw an opportunity to get rid of some enemies and hatched a plot in which the king was complicit. Around 120 soldiers, under the command of Captain Robert Campbell, were housed with the MacDonalds in Glen Coe, supposedly on a mission to collect certain new taxes; naturally they enjoyed traditional Highland hospitality. After a couple of weeks Campbell received orders to 'fall upon the Rebels' and to 'put all to the sword under 70'. Accordingly, on 13 February, Maclain and 37 other men were murdered and 40 women and children perished of cold after their homes were torched.

Despite a verdict of murder by an official inquiry into the massacre, and the Scottish parliament's petition to the king, no one was punished – for a crime sanctioned at the highest level.

The event is remembered each year at a memorial in Glencoe; happily the long-held animosity between MacDonalds and Campbells has all but disappeared.

towering buttresses that enclose Glen Coe on its southern side. It then ascends the massif of Bidean nam Bian, which rears up at the head of the valleys. Appropriately enough, the name probably means 'chief of the hills'. The walking conditions on the massif itself are fine – mainly on rocky ridges, which are narrow enough to feel airy without being dangerous or difficult. The route largely follows maintained paths, although foot-worn trails rather than purpose-built paths mark the way along the high, rocky ridges. The total ascent on the route is 1150m.

The approach includes a crossing of the Lost Valley, a bowl-like hanging valley that was created sometime during the last Ice Age. In more recent years this mountain sanctuary was used as a hiding place for cattle stolen by the MacDonald clan from the Campbells (see the boxed text on above). A walk to the Lost Valley is worthwhile in its own right; allow three hours for the return trip.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

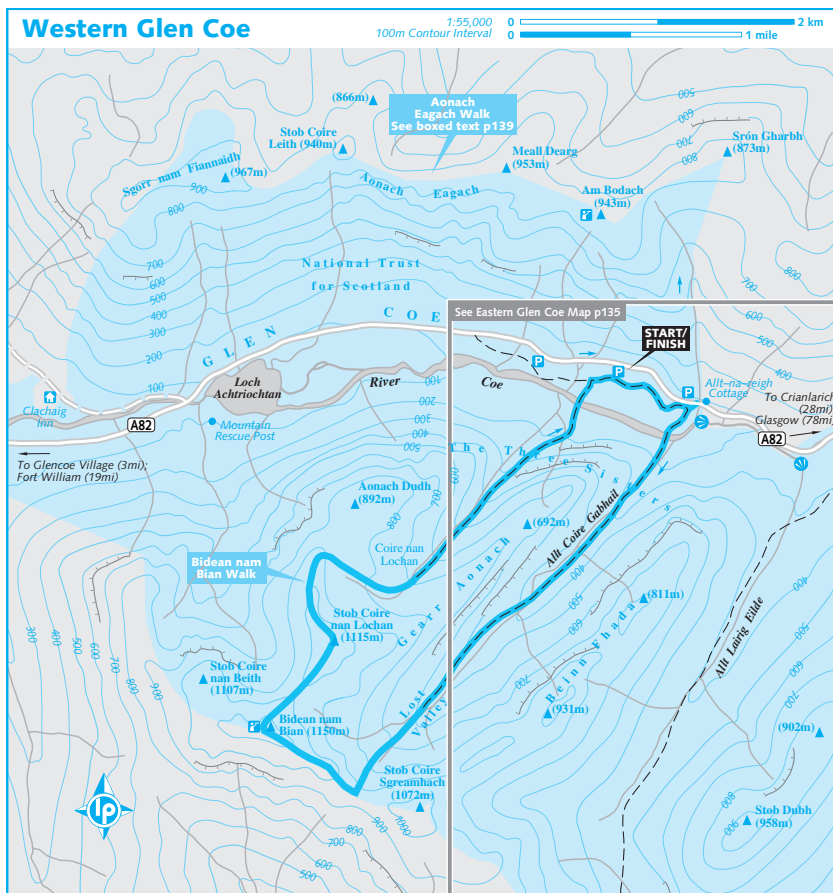
The walk begins and ends at the large parking area on the south side of the A82, a short distance west of the cottage at Allt-na-reigh. Buses operating along the A82 may stop here if requested in advance – see p134 for details.

THE WALK

From the parking area drop down the grassy slope south of the road and join a track that follows the banks of the River Coe upstream. Cross the river on a wooden footbridge and join a well-maintained path. This path leads up the rocky gorge that cuts between the towering crags of Beinn Fhada and Gairr Aonach, and hands are needed in several places to help mount easy rock steps. The path soon crosses onto the east bank of the Allt Coire Gabhail, and a short climb brings you over a rise and into the Lost Valley.

The floor of the valley is a jumble of rocks and boulders – pick your way diagonally across the muddle to join a more distinct path to the right. At the head of the valley a steep rock wall seems to rise almost vertically – the route ascends directly up this wall, although the terrain is not as steep as it first seems. The path continues up the valley, contouring above a gorge that has been chiselled out by the burn. Care is needed here in wet or icy weather.

The terrain steepens as you reach the headwall of the valley, and the ground becomes less stable underfoot. The climb itself is not easy-going, over a mixture of steep earth, scree and boulders rising sharply up to the ridge. Hands may be needed for balance in one or two places, and great care



must be taken if you descend this way. Once on top of the ridge, however, the views suddenly open out in all directions.

The summit of Bidean nam Bian is now about 1.2km away, along the ridge to the west. Stick to the crest of the ridge and climb over the boulders of several rises and subsidiary peaks, crossing one narrow section, before making a final ascent to the large cairn on the **Bidean nam Bian** summit (1150m), about four hours from the start. The views are exceptional and, on a clear day, the panorama includes the Western Isles, Ben Nevis and many of the peaks and ranges of the western Highlands.

Descend northeast from Bidean nam Bian, following a narrow, rocky spur down

to a col between Bidean nam Bian and Stob Coire nan Lochan; care is needed here in poor visibility. Climb up to the summit of **Stob Coire nan Lochan** (1115m), where the view is dominated by the Aonach Eagach ridge on the other side of Glen Coe.

To descend from Stob Coire nan Lochan it is necessary to walk northwest for a few hundred metres and then north for about the same distance, following the rim of some impressive cliffs. At a col turn east, descending into Coire nan Lochan. Cut across the grassy hollow and pick up paths beside the many small streams flowing towards the River Coe below. The streams soon converge and the path becomes clear, descending steeply on the eastern banks

CLASSIC WALK – AONACH EAGACH

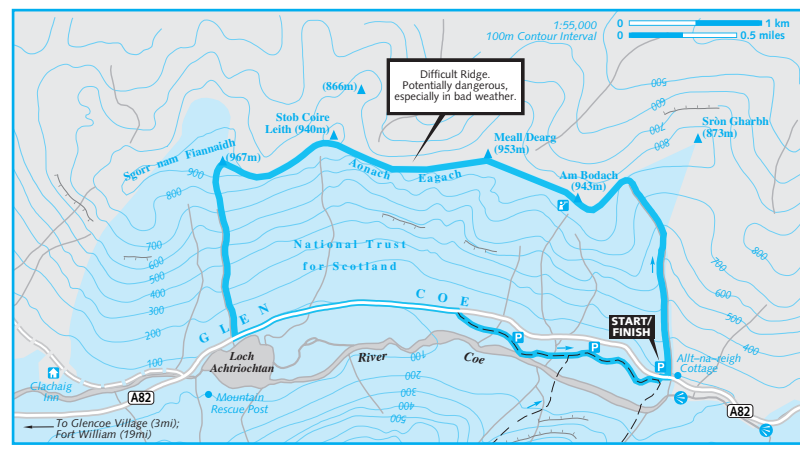
A spectacular ridge-line scramble, Aonach Eagach ('the notched ridge') forms a nearly sheer, 900m-high, 1.5km-long wall on the northern side of Glen Coe. Beyond the knife-edge ridge, the mountain falls away precipitously. You need to be fit, have a head for heights and some serious scrambling experience, as it's either sensational or terrifying, depending on your vertigo tolerance. Though it's only 6 miles (9.5km), allow seven to eight hours for this demanding outing, involving a 1000m ascent. It starts at a parking area just west of Allt-na-reigh cottage, a few miles east of Glencoe (p133). Once on the ridge there is no easy way to bypass difficulties at the crest and no simple escape routes into the valleys on either side. The route is generally completed from east to west because rock steps are less problematic in this direction. Take great care not to dislodge rocks as the route is popular and there's bound to be someone below. It's advisable to carry a decent length of climbing rope.

From the parking area, pick up a good path climbing steeply onto the southeast ridge of Am Bodach. After about 15 minutes the path flattens out beneath some crags and then turns to the east, skirting the base of these cliffs to reach the Allt Ruigh. Follow the stream on either side and continue to gain height, reaching the ridge between Am Bodach and Sron Gharbh 1½ hours from the start. Turn to the southwest and clamber up a broad, rocky ridge to reach the summit of **Am Bodach** (943m) at the beginning of the ridge (10 minutes further on). Now the fun starts.

Descending the rock step there's one awkward manoeuvre that is exposed on the right. If you find this stressful, don't continue – there are more difficult sections ahead. Once off this rock step the narrow ridge provides superb walking to **Meall Dearg** (953m), 30 minutes from Am Bodach.

Descend from Meall Dearg onto the ridge, which narrows and often calls for the use of hands. Edge across an exposed notch and then tackle the crux of the route – a gendarmed section of the ridge with vertical exposure on both sides. Move to the right (north) side and use a ledge to bypass a block before regaining the crest and easier ground. Descend steeply into a notch, where another difficult section begins; scramble up an exposed ramp on the left (south) side of the ridge. Descend again into another notch and scramble steeply but easily up a prominent gully to escape the final difficulties. You'll need about an hour for this section; longer if you rope-up anywhere.

Climb a rocky ridge to the summit of **Stob Coire Leith** (940m). A broad ridge descends gently then sweeps around for the day's final climb to the highest summit on the ridge, **Sgorr nam Fiannaich** (967m). Descend steeply to the south from the summit, picking up a faint path in the scree and working around rock outcrops. The descent is steep and unrelenting; if the grass on the lower half is wet, be extra careful. Back at the A82 (one to 1½ hours from Sgorr nam Fiannaich) turn left and walk east along the road for 1.5 miles to the parking area, avoiding some of the road by following a track below the road to the right.



of the burn. At the bottom of the descent, cross a wooden footbridge over the River Coe, from where it's a few hundred metres up the grassy slopes to the parking area.

MORE WALKS

LOCHABER The Aonachs

The Aonachs dominate the nearer eastwards view from Ben Nevis; Aonach Beag, at 1234m (4048ft), is the sixth-highest mountain in Scotland (despite its name – 'beag' means small). The flatness of the summit plateau contrasts with the exceptionally rugged crags that plummet into the eastern corries. The connoisseur's route begins at the Nevis Range car park, 6.5 miles northeast of Fort William along the A82; **Nevis Range** (☎ 01397 705825; www.nevisrange.com) is a commercial downhill ski centre and is clearly signposted. **Highland Country Buses** (☎ 01463 710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) operates a service from Fort William (£1.50, 15 minutes, six services Monday to Saturday, three Sunday).

The route approaches Aonach Mór along its fine northern spur; continue from there to Aonach Beag then traverse the summit plateau and descend across the ski fields. The distance is 11 miles (18km), for which you should allow around eight hours. You could also take advantage of the cable car (open all year), which will take you about halfway to the top of Aonach Mór.

Also consult OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 392.

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 ridge walk. The approach is quite long, however, and you'll need eight or nine hours for the traverse as far as Beinn na Socaich, or 10 hours if you go all the way to Sgurr Chòinnich Beag. Start and finish at Corriechoille, 2.5 miles east along a minor road from Spean Bridge. Unfortunately, public transport will only take you as far as Spean Bridge. The nearest facilities are in Spean Bridge and Fort William (p121). For the truly heroic, there's the Lochaber

Traverse, beginning at Corriechoille and traversing the Grey Corries, Aonachs and 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 and either of the recommended Munros guides (p108).

GLEN COE Beinn a' Bheithir

The Beinn a' Bheithir massif offers a route every bit as good as Bidean nam Bian or Buachaille Etive Mór. Summit views take in Morvern and Ardgour to the west. The walk starts and finishes at the forest car park in Glenachulish, near Ballachulish, 1 mile west of Glencoe village on the A82. The aim is first to reach the saddle between Sgòrr Dearg (1024m) and Sgòrr Dhonuill (1001m) then pick off the two summits. You'll need six or seven hours for the 8-mile (13km) outing, involving more than 1300m of ascent. Consult OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 384 and Cameron McNeish's *Munro Almanac*.

MORVERN, ARDGOUR & MOIDART

These rugged and less-frequented districts are separated from Lochaber by Loch Linnhe. Morvern and Ardgour can be reached most easily on the Corran ferry southwest of Fort William, while Moidart and the Rois-bheinn Ridge are most easily reached via Fort William. These areas have a quiet, wild charm, and although the peaks are not particularly high, the terrain is challenging – full of lumps, bumps, crags and steep places.

All the walks mentioned below can be completed as day trips from Fort William or Glencoe, using your own wheels. There's a sprinkling of hotels and B&Bs, and camp sites in Salen and Strontian.

The Scottish Mountaineering Club's guide *North-West Highlands* focuses on Ardgour and Moidart; Cameron McNeish's *Scotland's 100 Best Walks* describes routes in the area.

Garbh Bheinn

Garbh Bheinn (885m) is the fine, distant peak viewed so compellingly from Glencoe. Located in the southwest corner of Ardgour, it proves the point that Corbetts (below 914m) can be at least as demanding

as any Munro. This is a bonus for those who can ignore such arbitrary judgments of worth, because Garbh Bheinn is a superb peak with some demanding terrain and great views. A good circuit starts on the A861, just west of Inversanda, not far from the Corran ferry. With more than 1000m of ascent, the 9 miles (14.6km) should take seven to eight hours. Consult OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 391.

Rois-bheinn Ridge

Dominating Moidart, Rois-bheinn (882m) is the highest point on a ridge spiked with several summits over 800m. A long and strenuous circuit (with 1500m of ascent) of the rocky ridge can be made from Inverailort on the A861. The terrain is complex and navigation in poor weather may be difficult. Consult OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 390.

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