The 1033 High Hills of Britain

Alan Dawson

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with contributions from
Paul Richardson, Ann Bowker, Hugh Munro, Alan Rowan and Myrddyn Phillips

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Front cover: Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill (right), Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill East Top and Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill Far East Top (left), part of An Teallach. Photograph by Bert Barnett, numbers by Alan Dawson

Back cover: Sgurr Choinnich Mor from Stob Coire an Laoigh

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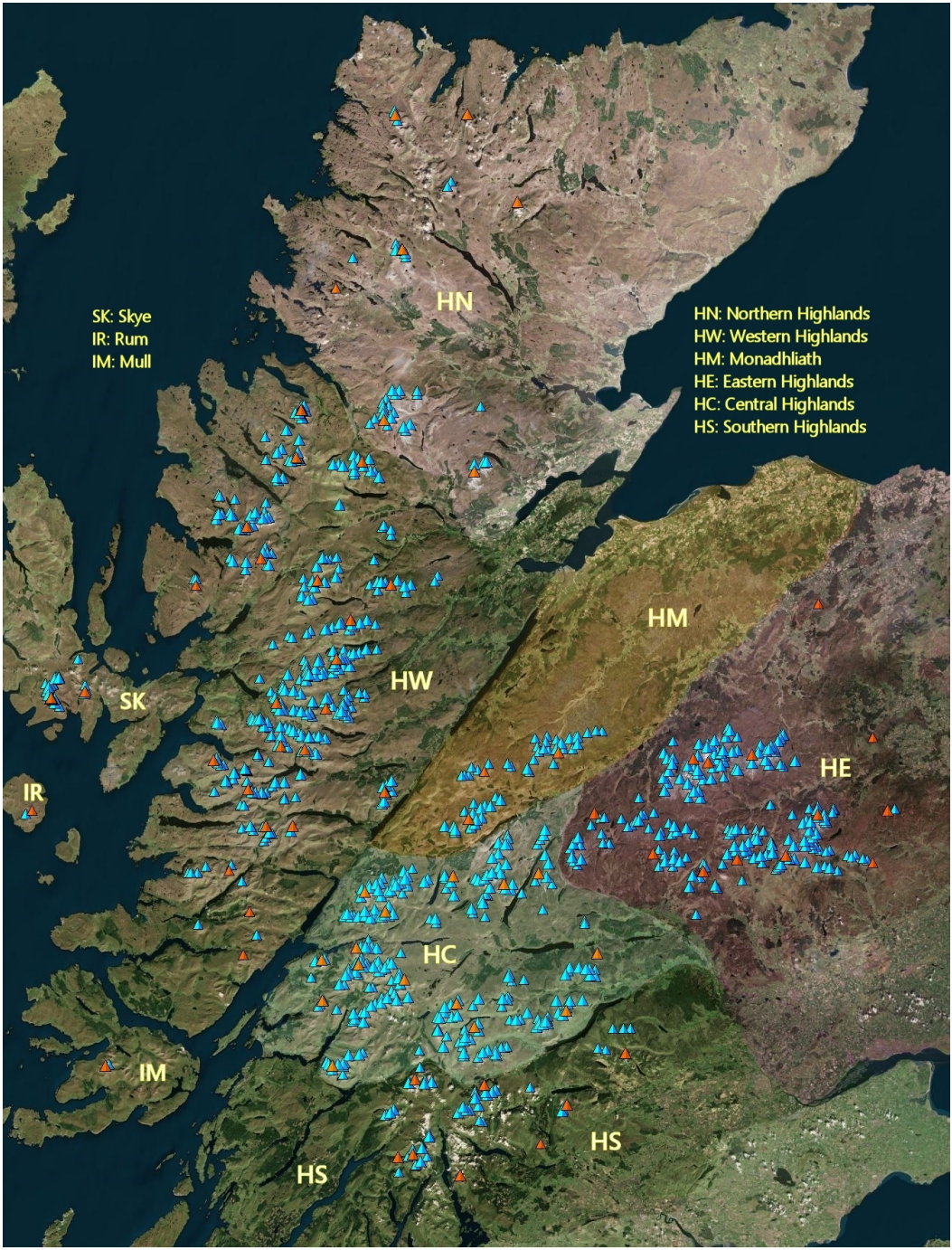


Orange triangles represent the highest hill in each hill area. Other areas are shown on page 408.

Hill Bragging

Let's get straight to the point. This book holds the key to the finest hill walking in Britain, which is to be found on the highest hills. Most of these are rarely climbed, so they have the potential to offer wonderful new experiences to hill walkers who are open-minded enough to consider the evidence and set foot where few have been before.

How can this be possible? In this small and busy land, with more guidebooks than hills, how can there be so much scope for new areas to explore, new adventures to enjoy, new summits to stand on? The answer is simple. There are far more high hills than most walkers realise because their thoughts have been constrained by categories, guidebooks and magazines. Almost all the books cover the same ground, often by the same routes. Superb hills for sure, and some fine books, but limited in scope and imagination. There is far more on offer for those who are willing to look beyond the standard fare, to release themselves from the shackles of tradition and take a fresh look at the topography of the land.

These bold assertions apply only to the Highlands of Scotland. The book does include hills in England and in Wales, but there are not many discoveries to be made in areas where every lump and bump over 2000 feet has been catalogued many times over. In Scotland there are hundreds of high hills that offer excellent walking where hardly anyone goes. Few people have climbed these hills because they have not been listed in well-known publications. The hills are not hidden from view but they have been hidden from the minds of hill walkers.

Another original feature of the book is its accuracy. The key criteria are precisely defined and rigorously followed. The outcome is the catalogue of the 1033 High Hills of Britain. The promise of rich new experiences can be fulfilled by exploring and climbing these hills. By bagging them. The high hills are a consequence of planetary history and weathering, but the list of high hills is a consequence of extensive research, fresh vision, accurate measurements and careful attention.

By 2020, most of the high hills had been surveyed using complex scientific equipment and software that exploits the phenomenal precision of the Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS). Heights for these hills are given to the nearest tenth of a metre, which is ten centimetres, four inches, the length of a long middle finger, the width of an average male hand.

All these figures are accurate. Hundreds of the heights are different from those published on maps and reproduced in guidebooks. The heights of hills surveyed using satellite-based technology are correct. If heights shown on maps and elsewhere are different, they are wrong. Close in most cases, but not correct. That is not subjective opinion, not hill bragging, it is the simple truth. More on that later for the sceptics and enthusiasts.

As well as innovation and accuracy, another substantial feature of the book is the set of stories, experiences and themes. These tales from the high hills are intended to put human flesh on the data bones, to illustrate what it was like to climb some of these hills for one observer on one day. The tales are for entertainment, they are not guides to advise which way to go. Guidebooks can be useful for beginners, but this book is for walkers who are willing to look at a list and a map and work out routes for themselves. The stories illustrate some of the possibilities available by setting off into the high hills armed with an agenda, an open mind and a torch. They provide a personal touch to complement the pedantic precision of the magnificent set of data that catalogues the magnificent set of hills.

Finally, the book takes a look back to where it all began, by assessing the work and legacy of Hugh Munro. His name is rarely mentioned in the rest of the book because it is not relevant. The rigorous approach used for defining the high hills requires taking a fresh look at the land free from the chains of the past. That is not being disrespectful to the pioneer of the genre. In fact, the chapter on Hills, Tops and Mountains is intended to reinstate the value of Munro's work in its entirety. His name lives on but his work has been diminished and distorted in the century since his death in 1919. Many well-informed people think that he is entitled to a legacy more in keeping with his broad vision and painstaking research. It turns out that the emperor does have some clothes, rather fine ones, but they have been through the mangle too many times and no longer fit, so it is time for a new outfit. Made to measure of course, but closely based on the classic collection from a century ago. The book therefore provides an examination and reinstatement of the past as well as a catalogue of the present and opportunities for the future.

The next four chapters describe the foundations on which the data sets and stories have been built. They cover the rationale, the topographic criteria, the basics of hill surveying and the hill groupings. Anyone not interested in background information and topographic principles may wish to skip these chapters and move on to the data and the stories, which start on Skye (page 19), move on to five other islands then cover the mainland from north to south.

Walls in the Mind

Your assumptions are your windows on the world.
Scrub them off every once in a while or the light won't come in.
Alan Alda, *Things I overheard while talking to myself*

The German phrase is *mauern im kopf*. Walls in the mind often stand longer than those built of concrete. So said Willy Brandt, Chancellor of West Germany from 1969 to 1974, who lived to see the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Everyone has their own mental walls, but those of hill baggers tend to be long and strong, resistant to change and evidence.

Walls in the mind can be useful. Life for most people is complex and uncertain, so we use assumptions, beliefs and categories to try to make some sort of sense of it all. Walls can also be dangerous to those who question their value. Thousands of people have been imprisoned or killed for challenging fundamental walls. Not just famous people like Socrates, Galileo Galilei and Jesus Christ, but ordinary people doing their job, such as writers, scientists, teachers and politicians.

It makes sense for hill baggers to like lists of hills. Without them it would be harder to decide where to go and difficult to keep count of the collection. Lists are an essential part of the game, but some people become so attached to a particular list that they are hostile toward ideas that blur boundaries and appear to challenge core beliefs. For example, Munros and Corbetts are just labels given to some hills, while Scotland and England are just labels given to some land, but few people say so. The similarities far outweigh the differences, but culturally these are different categories with clear boundaries. Anyone who mixes things up is likely to meet resistance from minds with firmly embedded walls.

When thinking about the criteria for the High Hills of Britain, I wanted the definition to be based on topography as much as possible. I tried to assess the walls in my own mind to distinguish between the physical and the cultural, so I examined each assumption to find out if it was a conceptual wall or a feature of the planet. Three words are a good place to start – High, Hill and Britain – before examining other concepts to assess whether they are a reflection of topography or mentality.

What is Britain?

Britain is a variable concept that can mean different things in different contexts. It is different from the United Kingdom, the British Isles and the island of Great Britain. It is based on topography but also usefully vague. The concepts of the United Kingdom, Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland are not relevant to topography so can be ignored when defining criteria, though some of the terms are useful as labels to convey general location. That leaves the islands of the British Isles – Great Britain, Ireland and all the other islands such as Skye, Mull, Man, May, Mingulay and Muckle Flugga.

I have chosen to exclude Ireland because it is a large and separate island that is not part of the concept of Britain and is beyond my area of expertise. I have to draw the line – the wall – somewhere in order to focus on a manageable physical area. Skye is now connected to the island of Great Britain by a bridge, which partially diminishes its status as an island. However, bridge or no bridge, I have chosen to include all the islands around the coast of Great Britain that are part of the concept of Britain. I have this focus because I live in Britain and it is my area of research and recreation.

What is high?

For the purposes of this book, it is ground that is at least 838 metres above sea level on the mainland or 770 metres on one of the islands. That is a new two-tiered line I have created because I believe it has value. The justification will come later, after other walls have been examined.

What is a hill?

Hills are topographic features of the planet, not walls in the mind. We know they exist on the ground because they can be seen, touched and walked on, unlike contour lines, lists and units of measurement. Hills are easy to see but not easy to define. In order to have meaning, the word *hill* must be defined in relation to something else. The 838 metres refers to the minimum altitude of a hill, but that alone is not enough. If hills were defined only by altitude then every rock or mound that protrudes above the specified height would count as a hill, so there would be millions of them. Another criterion is required in order to distinguish the hills from the rocks and mounds. The most useful additional criterion is relative height, which is the amount that a feature protrudes above the ground all around it. This is a topographic concept but still needs to be assessed.

Sea level

Sea level is a topographic feature but also to some extent a wall in the mind. The Ordnance Survey Newlyn datum is a reasonable attempt to define a variable feature as a constant, but it is a local concept not a planetary one. When George Everest's team measured Peak XV in the 1850s, they found it to be 29002 feet higher than the sea in the Bay of Bengal, not the sea by Cornwall. There is no world standard for sea level. Even if there were, it would need regular revision, because the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change predicts a rise in global sea level of between 50cm and 98cm by 2100, though it could be more. As the focus here is on Britain, it is useful to use the definition of sea level that has been adopted by the relevant British authority, Ordnance Survey. Measuring hills according to their distance from the centre of the Earth would be more topographically global but unhelpful for hill walkers. The sea is not level or stable, but if we want to measure things then we have to base our measurements on something. The definition of the high hills uses British sea level as it was when the list was conceived in 2018. If the official sea level were to change in future, it would have no effect on which hills are included.

Surveying by Satellite

Well it wouldn't be Scotland unless you are freezing to death or soaked by the rain or something is trying to drink your blood, would it now?

John D Burns, *The Last Hillwalker*

GPS stands for Global Positioning System, while GNSS stands for Global Navigation Satellite System. GNSS is the term used for the overall system, while GPS is the best-known example of it. GPS is to GNSS as Hoover is to vacuum cleaner, or iPhone is to phone. The process of surveying using GNSS is the same in principle as using a hand-held GPS device or GPS on a phone. You climb a hill, press a button or touch a screen, then look at the height reading and grid reference. It is an astonishingly complex and accurate system that is simple to use. It is the biggest and best thing ever for hill walkers, who can no longer go the wrong way or get lost. In theory, that is. Anyone with a car satnav system knows that reality is not always the same as theory.

There are three main reasons why surveying with specialist GNSS equipment is far more accurate than with a hand-held GPS device:

- The equipment is more sophisticated and can record multiple satellite data readings every minute.
- Complex software is used to process the data, apply models of the Earth and its atmosphere, then calculate the weighted average from numerous readings.
- The network of Ordnance Survey base stations (OS Net) is used to provide control data, so that multiple readings from an unknown point (a summit or col) can be compared with readings taken simultaneously from several known points. The process is called Differential GNSS because it calculates differences between readings at known reference points and unknown survey points.

Satellite signals are subject to interference as they pass through the Earth's atmosphere. That is one reason why height readings on phones or hand-held devices are not always accurate. Using OS Net and suitable software allows most sources of error to be eliminated. Rain and mist on summits make little difference compared to atmospheric variations.

The outcome is that it is possible for a careful amateur surveyor to measure the height of any point on open ground on the mainland to within an accuracy of 4cm to 10cm. However, there is more to it than pressing a few buttons. You have to carry the equipment to the point you want to survey. If it is a summit, you have to identify the highest natural point. This may be beneath a cairn, on top of a steep tor or somewhere unclear on a heathery plateau. On lower hills it may be in a forest or inside a hilltop building such as a castle.

You have to set up the equipment so that it is stable, measure how far it is positioned above (or below) the highest point, then wait around to collect data for as long as you judge necessary. You pack up and move on and then, if you want to find out the relative height, you have to locate the relevant col and measure that too, which is where things often start to get more difficult. When you get back you have to download the relevant OS Net control data and process the data sets using expensive software in order to get the final results.

My early surveying was sporadic and selective. I measured six high hills during one week in April 2012 then none for fourteen months. Two years after buying my equipment, I had surveyed only 21 high hills. In the next six months I managed 128. Lack of motivation and fitness, living in a city and personal commitments were all factors in my negligence, so I was slow to learn from my early surveying efforts. The Pentland Hills were pleasant, there were some good bands to see in Edinburgh and some good pubs to visit, but when I was advised to seek therapy to cure me from hill walking, I knew it was time to move back to the Highlands.

By 2014, I realised that I could greatly reduce data quantity at each survey point without sacrificing data quality. Regardless of official advice and received wisdom, I began to trust the evidence of my own data sets and to streamline the process. This was essential for surveying on Skye because my progress was so slow along the Cuillin ridge. I got more used to the steepness and exposure but I could never hurry over such difficult ground.

Surveying requires better weather than walking. The equipment can cope with the rain, and darkness is not a problem, but wind is an issue. The antenna is designed to be screwed on to a pole or tripod that needs to be fairly still for best results, so I bought some short survey poles that were more stable than a one-metre pole. I also began to improvise by using woolly hats for cushioning if it was too windy or rocky to use a pole or tripod, and found that the data sets were still good.

Cold does not affect the equipment but it is a big issue for the surveyor. Warmth soon slips away from hands and feet when waiting at summits or cols. As well as being painful, frozen fingers make it difficult to press the right buttons and write notes. Short survey times can be vital for digital survival in cold weather. Snow may blow off summits but it often piles up at cols, making it impossible to locate the optimum survey point. Mist is manageable for satellite signals and navigation but it can render a laser level useless for locating the highest point of a summit.

If there is no snow, wind or rain, there is a fair chance that there will be midges. These are not life-threatening but can be more maddening than ever when you are required to stay in the same place. I am one of those people that midges love, but it is not reciprocal. Midges are not solitary creatures and like to socialise in vast numbers. Sometimes they pierce an eyelid that might swell to impede vision or a lip that can make drinking awkward for an hour or more. They can be harder to cope with than tough terrain or terrible weather. Surveying hills can be a difficult challenge, an endurance test and terrific, problem-solving fun at the same time.

By autumn 2020, I had surveyed the summits of 822 high hills and 640 of the cols. It would be good to have done them all but I started too late, have other stuff to do and have often been deterred by wind, rain and lethargy. A further fifteen summits that I had not surveyed had been measured by other surveyors using GNSS: five in Wales by Myrddyn Phillips, nine by Myrddyn with G&J Surveys (four in Wales, five in Scotland), and one by G&J Surveys without him (Buidhe Bheinn).

My surveys had found the heights of OS trig pillars to be highly accurate, so I used the OS triangulation point archive to obtain heights for a further nineteen hills. However, trig pillars are often not on the highest point, so I read comments from hill baggers and studied photographs to help assess the height of these summits.

Accurate height data is available for a further fourteen high hills using a different technology, Lidar, which is briefly described in the section on Arran. Heights derived from trig points or Lidar may change by up to 0.3m if surveyed using GNSS. That leaves 163 summits (15.8%) where I have had to rely on spot heights shown on OS maps. These are pretty good considering that most of them were measured by taking photographs from planes, but they are only accurate to within about three metres. Heights from GNSS surveys are about fifty times better than that, but in some cases neither method can guarantee that the highest point has been measured. If a summit has a large cairn or other obstruction, the actual height may be a little higher than the survey result. Some surveyed heights are therefore not beyond all trace of doubt, but there is no doubt that this book contains the most accurate hill list ever published.

Surveying the highest rock on the summit of Beinn Bhrotain

Surveying the summit of Chno Dearg. The top of the rock to the right of the pole was the point measured, but a higher embedded rock could be buried beneath the cairn.

Hill Areas

There is nothing more horrible than to walk that fault line between new and old, seeing what the future holds, screaming about it in your art or writing, and finding only mute incomprehension or dismissal in your audience.

Joshua Cooper Ramo, *The age of the unthinkable*

The high hills are defined by topography, so the hill groupings should be as well. This is a key principle, though most hill walkers will not like it, not at first anyway. I have therefore abandoned the familiar but flawed sections from earlier lists and used topographic criteria to divide the mainland of Britain into 137 hill areas, 81 of which include high hills. There are also high hills on seven island areas. Some of the mainland areas cross political borders because that is the way the land is. This approach is not unique. In his book *More Relative Hills of Britain*, Mark Jackson used a scheme to divide Britain into main 26 topographic sections, each identified by a letter of the alphabet. The scheme was well-researched and scientifically based, but most hill baggers have found it difficult to remember.

Relying entirely on topography to group hills into areas is appealing in theory, but in practice it can be unhelpful. For example, Canisp, Slioch, Ben Hee and Beinn Alligin all have over 600m relative height. If this figure were used to define hill areas, then they would have to have their own small areas, while only two areas would cover the whole of Scotland east of the A9 between Perth and Inverness, where Ben Macdui and Lochnagar are the only hills with over 600m drop. This would not be very useful for hill walkers. A more flexible scheme is needed to produce a set of hill areas that are practically useful but still based on topographic principles, with all boundaries defined by natural features. These are the rules I have applied to meet this aim:

- Hills with over 700m drop *must* have their own area.
- Hills with under 700m drop *may* have their own area.
- All land in Britain must be covered. This allows the scheme to be used for lower hills.
- Area boundaries must follow coasts, lochs, rivers, burns or glens, not roads or counties.
- The same hill areas should be usable for hills of any height.

The second rule gives the flexibility needed to make the scheme useful for hill bagging. There are 52 hills with over 700m drop, so these form the mandatory hill areas. Two of the 52 are too low to qualify as high hills, leaving exactly fifty, known as the Big Fifty. A further 33 high hills have 600-700m drop. Twenty of these 33 have been allocated their own hill area, but the thirteen shown below have not, either because their areas would be very small or they are part of a natural hill grouping.

Name	Drop	Grouped with	Name	Drop	Grouped with
Canisp	689	Ben More Assynt	Sgurr Ghiubhsachain	616	Sgurr Dhomhnuill
Garbh Bheinn	685	Sgurr Dhomhnuill	Sgurr nan Eugallt	612	Ladhar Bheinn
Fionn Bheinn	658	Sgurr Mor (Fannichs)	Stob Coire Easain	611	Ben Nevis
Beinn Fhada	643	North Glen Shiel range	Cadair Idris	608	Aran Fawddwy
Beinn Eighe	632	Liathach	Ben Hee	607	Foinaven
Ben Vorlich	632	Beinn Ime	Beinn Alligin	602	Liathach
Slioch	626	Fisherfield hills			

Northern Highlands

Hill areas:	8
High hills:	41
Highest:	Beinn Dearg, 1081.7m
Lowest:	Carn Ban South Top, 838.7m
Busiest:	Ben Wyvis (640)
Quietest:	Cnap Coire Loch Tuath (20)

This region covers all the ground north of a waterline from Loch Broom to the Cromarty Firth, which is roughly the route of the A835 from Ullapool to Dingwall. Most of Caithness is low-lying, so there are no high hills east of lonely Ben Klibreck. The Northern Highlands is the only region where many of the lower hills are more popular than the higher ones. Several magnificent hills such as Arkle, Quinag, Suilven, Cul Beag, Ben Mor Coigach and Stac Pollaidh are all under 810m high.

Twenty-one of the 41 high hills are in one area, HN07. Many of these are rarely climbed, including the remarkable pyramid of Creag an Duine. The appearance of some of the other hills in this area is less inspiring, but their physical appeal is substantial, for the terrain on most of them is very good for walking.

Canisp is the most prominent hill that has not been allocated its own area. It has been grouped with Ben More Assynt and Quinag as it is topographically connected to that area. Cul Mor is a little less prominent than Canisp but is slightly higher. Its hill area includes several of the striking lower hills of Coigach and Assynt.

Arkle from Foinaven

HN07 and HN08 are shown on page 61. There are no high hills in HN03.

HN02 Hope-loyal

OS map: 9 Key col: 155m at NC487402

Number	Height	Name	Drop	Location	Summit
1123	927.2	**Ben Hope**	772	NC 4775 5015	Trig

Ben Hope

Ben Hope is a memorable hill. It is isolated, distinctive, easy to pronounce and easy to locate on a map. It does not look as impressive as Foinaven but it is a little higher and a lot more popular. In 2019 it became even more memorable.

I had first intended to climb Ben Hope in 1979, just after I had climbed Ben Nevis. I only wanted to climb those two hills, the highest one and the far northern one that I remembered seeing in 1970. However, Ben Hope looked less interesting than an intriguing shape further east, so I climbed that instead. It was Ben Loyal.

I was not aware of categories or how you were supposed to go about climbing hills. I had no rucksack but I did have a pocket radio, so I climbed Ben Loyal while listening to England scraping past New Zealand to reach the final of the 1979 Cricket World Cup, which they lost. Ben Hope had to wait another thirteen years, when I went up from the north. I had a rucksack that time and remembered having to take it off to edge along a ledge on the way up the north ridge. The view from the top I had waited so long to see consisted of little but mist.

Twenty years later I was in the same area but Ben Hope was not on my agenda. I was there to survey Meallan Liath, a hill 4km east of Ben Hope that was either 598m or 601m depending on which OS map you believed. The higher figure might be enough to give it 150m of relative height, so it was an important measurement. The walk from Kinloch Lodge by the Kyle of Tongue was enjoyable, but the summit of Meallan Liath was in mist and I was troubled by a sore knee, so I felt unfit and fed up.

After setting up the col survey I decided to climb another hill rather than sit and wait for satellite data, so I set off toward Sail Romascaig, south of Ben Hope. My knee was still sore but I took my time on the steep ascent between two appealing lochans. The weather improved and so did my mood as I climbed higher into a rockier landscape to the top of Sail Romascaig.

As I limped back down toward the corrie, the last banks of mist lifted from broad slopes to the north, where the outline of a large hill took shape. It was Ben Hope and it started silently calling to me:

> *It's June, it's the far north, it barely gets dark, you've never seen the view from the top have you, look at those lovely gentle slopes of grass and stones, why are you going down when you could be going up? Never mind the knee, it's only a bit sore, you haven't got a broken leg, it's only 3km to the top, you can go as slowly as you like.*

The summit was stunning. It was not a full sunset, but the shafts of low evening light put on a soothing, pure display, lighting up banks of cloud that hovered over Cranstackie and turned Foinaven into gentle outlines that masked its usual austere appearance.

I sat alone in silence and let the ambience seep through my jacket, my skin, my hat and my head. This was the kind of thing that had got me hooked on climbing hills in the first place and kept me going – the promise of something special that underpinned all the bagging and surveying.

Here was pure peace and effortless natural beauty, free from the cares and pressures of civilisation.

Sooner or later I had to return to that mundane world. I sent a text message to my friends in Scourie to inform them that I would be late back, then I adopted a stiff-legged walk to keep my right leg straight, trying to silence the torn cartilage that nagged each time I bent my knee. I collected my equipment from the Meallan Liath col, where it had been receiving data for 166 minutes. Even after thousands more surveys, it was still my longest data set from any single point.

I skirted the southern slopes of Meallan Liath and located the path back to Kinloch Lodge. My limbs were weary and my knee sore, but my mood was in a far higher plane than on the approach. Ben Hope therapy had not cured my knee, but whatever it had done I knew that I would like some more of it. I got my knee fixed a year later with arthroscopic surgery.

In February 2019, when I heard that two climbers were missing on Ben Hope, my first thought was that it was an unusual place for an incident. Call-outs were common on Ben Nevis, in Glen Coe and in the Cairngorms, but not in the far north. When I heard the names of the casualties, I could scarcely believe it was possible. I had met Andy Nisbet on Skye in 2013, where he was one of a party assembled to survey Knight's Peak. In damp mist, the gully between the black walls of Knight's Peak and Sgurr nan Gillean looked more forbidding than I remembered from a recent solo visit, but Andy hardly had to break his stride. He swiftly set up the rope and helped everyone else up the tricky bit, then reversed the operation on the way down. His expertise was no surprise, as he was an immensely accomplished climber, but I was more struck by the calm, careful and courteous way he operated. I was the last one down the gully and his manner was as patient and helpful then as it had been all day.

Andy Nisbet and Steve Perry had fallen when walking roped together after a successful climb. One little error in judgement or concentration had cost them their lives. It could happen to anyone at any time, for no-one was invincible, but not like this, not to two such experienced and skilled climbers.

One year after the accident, Steve Perry's daughter Adele climbed Ben Hope in memory of the pair and to raise money for the two mountain rescue teams that had done all they could to save them. She was not a hill walker but was determined to find something positive in the aftermath of her father's death.

Over the years I had come to question the value and impact of large events that used the hills to raise money for charities and causes that had nothing to do with the landscape, wildlife or walking. However, this was different. Mountain rescue teams provided an exceptional, non-judgemental voluntary service, often under appalling conditions, so this small fund-raising walk of personal significance was one that I was pleased to support. Painful memories were harder to fix than painful knees, but I hoped that an ascent of Ben Hope would once again prove to have some sort of therapeutic value.

HW02 Mullach-slioch

OS map: 19 Key col: 424m at NH068715

Number	Height	Name	Drop	Location	Summit
1007	1015.2	**Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair**	591	NH 0520 7351	Cairn
1011	977.8	Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair East Top	29.4	NH 0562 7339	Cairn
1022	915.4	Sgurr Dubh	48.7	NH 0605 7292	Cairn
3258	849.2	Meall Garbh	90.4	NH 0495 7265	Cairn
1009	989	Sgurr Ban	165	NH 0558 7454	Cairn
1024	914.0	Beinn a' Chlaidheimh	271	NH 0613 7756	Rock by cairn
1019	933.8	Beinn Tarsuinn	207.1	NH 0396 7279	Cairn on rock
6662	867.2	Suidheachan Fhinn	28.6	NH 0341 7294	Rock
1014	965.8	**A' Mhaighdean**	443.0	NH 0077 7491	Boulder
1023	918.7	Ruadh Stac Mor	169.8	NH 0185 7565	Rock by trig
1025	906.3	**Beinn Dearg Mor**	564	NH 0322 7992	Cairn
1027	856	**Beinn a' Chaisgein Mor**	346	NG 9825 7854	Rocks
1026	859	**Beinn Lair**	456	NG 9816 7327	Cairn
1010	981.2	**Slioch**	626	NH 0046 6907	Cairn
1020	934.5	Sgurr an Tuill Bhain	56.4	NH 0185 6887	Rock by cairn
19494	932.1	Slioch South Top	21.7	NH 0075 6852	Rock by cairn

Beinn Tarsuinn and Suidheachan Fhinn

Hugh Munro's work played an important part in my ambitions for several years. As soon as I discovered its existence, I decided that I would climb all the hills he had listed. I could not see the point in missing out almost half of them, as most hill walkers did. Beinn Tarsuinn turned out to be the last one, in June 1998, twelve years after I began the quest. I had not climbed Meall nan Tarmachan South Top, but that was one of my own discoveries as Munro could not have known its height.

There was no grand plan and no rush. A year earlier in the Cairngorms, I had climbed five of the remaining nine in one day. It was an odd walk, from Linn of Dee to Carn a' Mhaim and then over the shoulder of Ben Macdui to Beinn a' Chaorainn and Beinn Bhreac. After that, Meall Dearg on Liathach was a potential stopper that had to be tackled, followed by Gulvain and its South Top, leaving only Beinn Tarsuinn.

The idea of climbing the Fisherfield set in one walk had never appealed to me. People seemed to take three days over it, involving two restless nights in a soggy tent or crowded bothy, with big rivers to cross to reach the hills. They saw only one route in and out of Fisherfield and they omitted Sgurr Dubh. I decided I would rather spend three days on three walks from three directions, climbing all the hills in the group and ending each day in a quiet and comfortable bed.

I had reached A' Mhaighdean and Ruadh Stac Mor from Poolewe, and the other five via Corriehallie and Loch a' Bhraoin, so that left only Beinn Tarsuinn. I did not make much of the occasion, but two friends happened to be staying near Kinlochewe, so there were four of us on the top for the quiet celebration. I liked the fact that I could not see anything man-made from the summit – no masts or tracks, no plantations or fences, just a superb, wild-looking landscape.

The consequence of my three routes was that I had never walked between Beinn Tarsuinn and A' Mhaighdean, despite a revisit to both, so I had never been over Suidheachan Fhinn, the intriguing, crinkled ridge west of Beinn Tarsuinn.

In 2018 this ridge became the focal point for another outing from Kinlochewe. By then I knew about the hydro schemes in place on the way up to Gleann na Muice, as I had heard about the damage being done during construction. I was expecting to see yet another area of wild land being sacrificed for industrial development, but my low expectations helped, as the aftermath of the work was less intrusive than I had feared. The track had been widened and extended, but as I was on a bike for the first hour, I was not entitled to complain about that. The dams were visible of course, but all the clutter and debris from construction had been cleared away and attempts had been made to reinstate the areas of disturbance. I had seen a lot worse elsewhere.

The hydro scheme went only halfway up Gleann na Muice, so by the time I parked the bike and reached the key viewpoint for Slioch, Lochan Fada, Beinn Tarsuinn and beyond, there was nothing to disrupt that wonderful landscape of hills and water.

Sgurr an Thuill Bhain from the route to Beinn Tarsuinn

On the ridge of Suidheachean Fhinn

Language and Pronunciation

The names of hills and places influence how we relate to them. The Gaelic names of most Highland hills add to their appeal, suggesting something romantic or historic, with a hint of mystery and poetry. It might be easier for English speakers to say Big Red Hill, but it sounds far more evocative to refer to Beinn Dearg Mor.

Like most hill walkers, I had struggled when faced with intimidating words such as fhearchair and ceathramhnan. I made the usual mistake of trying to pronounce them as English words. When that failed I looked for silly alternatives like cheesecake instead of sheasgaich. It took me a long time to absorb some of the sounds and rhythms of the language, and to appreciate how t-sneachda could sound like tractor, or t-saighdeir could become tidier.

It did not take much effort to learn a few basic rules, but I was slow at it and most walkers seemed not to bother at all. Several names did look temptingly pronounceable as English words, but I began to wince when I heard someone say *ch* as though they were talking about cheese. Sometimes I would try to assist by mentioning that *ch* was always hard in Gaelic names, but my comments were like water off a duch's bach.

I did not become converted, but I did read John Murray's book on the Gaelic landscape and I learned to appreciate some of the cadence of the language and to perceive elements of poetry and beauty within some apparently impenetrable names. I liked to think that this enriched my feeling of connection with the high hills, but it meant that I tended to lose contact with other walkers. The more authentic I sounded, the less my friends knew what I was on about. Although I tried to sound authentic, I did not believe the names themselves were authentic. Many people thought that hills had correct names, as they had correct heights, but I saw a crucial difference. Hill names were labels that had been applied in the past to assist communication and identification. Some names might also have helped to preserve collective memories of people or events, but there was nothing intrinsically correct about any of them.

Hill names acquire meaning and power through regular use and common experience. Over time a close association develops between a hill and its name. Let's take a well-known example, Slioch. Great hill, great name, pronounceable and unique. It is easy to regard Slioch as the real name of the hill. Calling it Spear would be doing it a disservice by belittling its grandeur. Yet language purists might not be happy with the name Slioch. Ronald Burn asserted that its real name was An Sleaghaich. It would make linguistic sense to refer to it as The Spear, in line with The Saddle (An Diollaid) and The Forge (An Teallach). It is not unusual for names to acquire definite articles, but these sound cumbersome if you are familiar with the simpler name.

Sleaghaich is pronounced as Slioch, so the simplified name could be seen as a corruption, like Ben Attow instead of Beinn Fhada. However, hills do not have real names, and hill names do not have to follow the same rules as language in general. The word Slioch has become so closely associated with the 981.2m hill by Kinlochewe that there would be no merit in trying to change it to An Sleaghaich, not for hill walkers anyway. Dogmatic language enthusiasts might disagree.

What about The Saddle though? It is an anomaly, a high Highland hill with an English name. Should it be saddled with An Diollaid as the culturally correct label? What would that achieve? It would not

enhance communication if some walkers referred to it as Ann Die-o-laid and others said Ndyollet.

Although I liked the language of the Highland hills, I did not conclude that all hills ought to have a Gaelic name. I was not keen on the name Beinn Nibheis that had started appearing in books and on maps as an alternative to Ben Nevis. I suspected that it reflected a cultural drive to impose Gaelic names where there was no need for them. Ben Nevis was a great name, it was internationally known, easily pronounced, and an excellent multilingual label.

As well as trying to improve my pronunciation, I enjoyed learning some of the meaning of the hill language – the shapes of sgurrs, mealls, cnocs and stobs, the common colours like buidhe, dearg and dubh, and some of the birds, animals and geographic features depicted in hill names.

I was sometimes confused by the inconsistent spellings of hill names on several Ordnance Survey maps, but it was inevitable that errors would occur when dealing with tens of thousands of names. As OS names had acquired the mantle of authority, names that were theoretically wrong had become practically right through usage and repetition. OS maps were the primary source for many of the names in depopulated areas. The maps helped keep the hill language alive and had become the best authority available in most cases.

My policy for names of the high hills has been to follow OS usage and accept the inconsistencies unless I was sure there had been a typographic error. However, I saw no merit in adding accents to hill names in a publication for hill walkers. Accents seemed to be redundant and unhelpful in this context. I also reserved the right to apply poetic or pedantic licence in occasional cases. I did not accept the incongruous label Lord Berkeley's Seat for a rocky peak that warranted a more fitting name. Questioning and renaming were permitted in 2020. However, I was happy with Carnedd Uchaf as a long-established name and saw no merit in a recently invented alternative. I preferred hill names based on physical features to those based on mythology or personalisation.

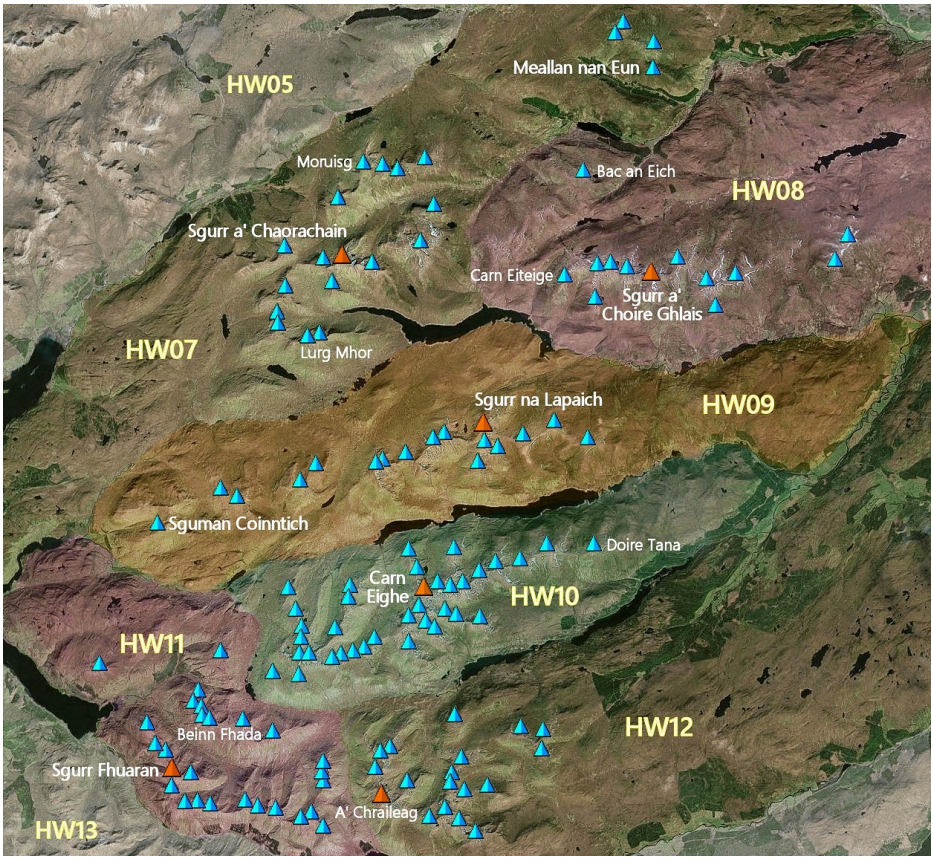
I considered offering English translations for Gaelic hill names, but I was not an authority on the subject, much of the information was available elsewhere and there was too much uncertainty. For example, what did Beinn Enaiglair mean? According to current guidance it meant hill of the timid birds, but that seemed rather unlikely. Most birds were timid, apart from exceptions like the coal tits that landed on my hand near Boat of Garten or the puffins within touching distance on Staffa, Unst and Lunga. Unless you were protecting or feeding them, birds flew away when you came close. Timidity was not an unusual characteristic that would lead to the naming of a hill. Perhaps the name was derived from Aonach Lair. Ronald Burn reckoned that the name ought to be Beinn Aon a' Chlair, meaning hill all in one piece. That didn't seem to mean much, but who was qualified to say he was wrong?

I suspected that many English translations of hill names were questionable but had become accepted through regular reproduction. I found it simpler to accept the name Beinn Enaiglair as a fitting label that did not require any meaning other than an 889.7m hill near Braemore junction. I had still not got the rhythm worked out, but I had found that practising pronunciation made a change from thinking about numbers as I made my way back to the rathad toward the end of a long latha amongst the beanntan ard.

Western Highlands: Central

Hill areas:	6
High hills:	132
Highest:	Carn Eighe, 1182.8m
Lowest:	Meallan nan Uan and Sgurr Gaorsaic, 838.3m
Busiest:	Sgurr Fhuaran (551)
Quietest:	Carn Eiteige (16)

This region covers the huge heart of the Highlands to the west of the Great Glen, south of Glen Carron and Strath Bran, north of Glen Shiel and Glen Moriston. It includes the hills around the big glens of Affric, Cannich, Strathfarrar and Strathconon, and the long lochs of Monar and Mullardoch. Carn Eighe is one of only three hills with over 1000m drop, but it is more prominent topographically than visually. The region includes a huge number of less well-known hills in a landscape of deep glens, lonely lochans, long ridges, steep slopes and tiring days. All the areas include at least twelve high hills. No hill area has more than the 36 in HW10 Carneighe-ceathramhnan, half of them over 1000m. By strict criteria, Beinn Fhada should also be included in HW10 (or should have its own area), but it makes more sense for hill walkers to group Beinn Fhada with Glen Shiel rather than Carn Eighe.



Larger illustrations of areas HW10 and HW11 are shown on pages 108 and 112

HW07 Chaorachain-moruisg

OS map: 25 Key col: 483m at NH158462

Number	Height	Name	Drop	Location	Summit
885	1053.1	**Sgurr a' Chaorachain**	570	NH 0875 4473	Shelter cairn
887	1046.6	Bidean an Eoin Deirg	84	NH 1036 4432	Rock
892	999.3	Sgurr Choinnich	133	NH 0762 4462	Grass
902	901.9	Sgurr na Conbhaire	79.9	NH 0807 4334	Grass
891	1005.3	**Creag Toll a' Choin**	402	NH 1308 4532	Rock
3225	853	Creag Dhubh Mhor	94	NH 1398 4735	
907	849.6	**Bac an Eich**	336.2	NH 2221 4895	Rock by trig
896	986	**Lurg Mhor**	444	NH 0648 4044	Cairn
897	974	Meall Mor	42	NH 0721 4057	Grass by cairn
898	945	Bidein a' Choire Sheasgaich	210	NH 0491 4125	Cairn
6530	852	Bidein a' Choire Sheasgaich North Top	21	NH 0487 4173	
904	863	Beinn Tharsuinn	226	NH 0552 4334	Cairn
906	862	Sgurr na Feartaig	266	NH 0551 4539	Cairn
899	925.7	**Moruisg**	593	NH 1011 4994	Cairn
3223	872.6	Moruisg East Top	68.4	NH 1116 4960	Cairn
3227	850.9	Moruisg Far East Top	61.1	NH 1203 4957	Cairn
3222	873.1	Carn Gorm	86.3	NH 1354 5001	Rock by cairn
900	913.4	Sgurr nan Ceannaichean	185	NH 0872 4806	Cairn on rock
903	878.8	**Sgurr a' Mhuilinn**	579	NH 2646 5574	Cairn
908	846.9	Sgurr a' Choire-rainich	139.5	NH 2479 5691	Cairn
3228	843.5	Sgurr a' Ghlas Leathaid	62.5	NH 2436 5643	Cairn
909	838.3	Meallan nan Uan	156.4	NH 2636 5447	Rock by cairn

Bidean an Eoin Deirg

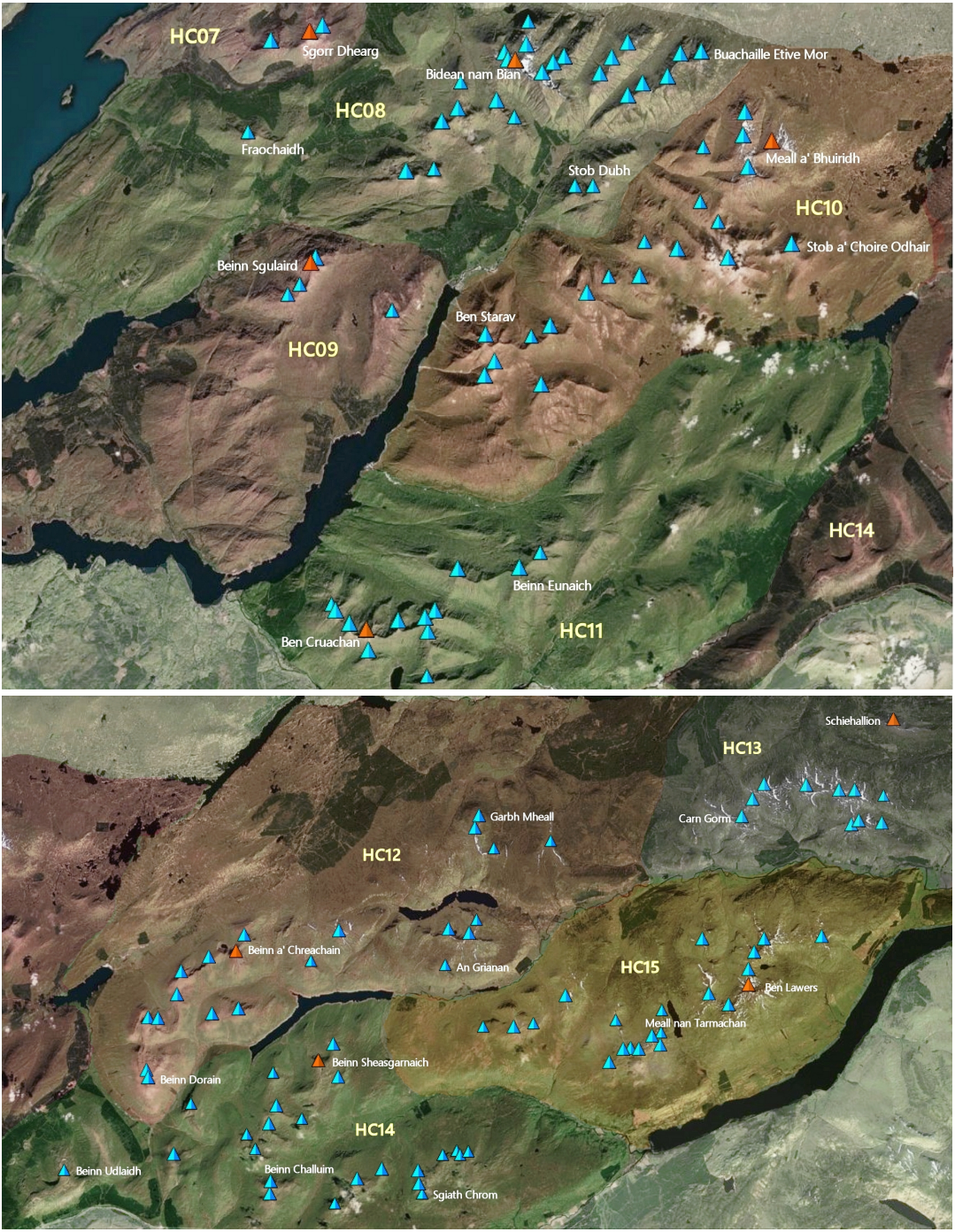
Central Highlands: South

Hill areas:	9
High hills:	144
Highest:	Ben Lawers, 1214.3m
Lowest:	Beinn Trilleachan, 839.4m
Busiest:	Ben Lawers (902)
Quietest:	Meall nan Each North Top (8)

This region covers the land east of Loch Linnhe, south of Glen Coe, Loch Rannoch and Loch Tummel, west of Glen Garry, and north of Loch Tay, Glen Dochart, Glen Lochy and the pass of Brander. It includes the famous giants of Glen Coe and Glen Etive, the Ben Cruachan group, the symmetrical landmark of Schiehallion and the ever-popular Ben Lawers, the only hill over 1200m outside the Cairngorms or the Ben Nevis range. Most of these hills are reasonably close to a public road, some so close that direct ascents are brutally steep. In general, the hills nearer the west coast are sharper, shapelier and harder work, while the gentler outlines of the mass of grassy hills around Glen Lyon are ideal for striding out on long, lonely and productive days.

The criteria for the high hills may change some perspectives, with the Meall nan Tarmachan nine outscoring the Ben Lawers eight, and Sgiath Chuil becoming the highest peak in a range of seven rather than the junior partner in an unnatural pairing. The hills have not changed, only ways of seeing them. The key cols are not always where one might expect. For example, Fraochaidh is connected to the Bidean nam Bian area (HC08), while Beinn Udlaidh is part of the Beinn Sheasgarnaich area (HC14) despite being west of the main road and railway between Tyndrum and Bridge of Orchy.

Creag Mhor


HC07
Sgorr Dhearg
Bidean nam Bian
Buachaille Etive Mor
HC08
Fraochaidh
Meall a' Bhuiridh
Stob Dubh
HC10
Stob a' Choire Odhair
Beinn Sgulaird
Ben Starav
HC09
HC14
Beinn Eunaich
HC11
Ben Cruachan
Schiehallion
HC13
Garbh Mheall
Carn Gorm
HC12
Beinn a' Chreachain
An Grianan
HC15
Ben Lawers
Meall nan Tarmachan
Beinn Sheasgarnaich
Beinn Dorain
HC14
Beinn Udlaidh
Beinn Challuim
Sgiath Chrom

HC07 Dhearg-dhonuill

OS map: 41 Key col: 295m at NN051543

Number	Height	Name	Drop	Location	Summit
195	1024.2	**Beinn a' Bheithir - Sgorr Dhearg**	729	NN 0568 5584	Cairn
205	946.2	Sgorr Bhan	47.9	NN 0626 5605	Cairn
198	1002.1	Sgorr Dhonuill	245.1	NN 0405 5554	Rock

Sgorr Dhonuill, Sgorr Dhearg and Sgorr Bhan

Not many hill walkers would recognise the names Glen Duror or Gleann an Fhiodh, but these are the glens that separate three high hills from Fraochaidh and the hills south of Glen Coe. The glens are so deep that Sgorr Dhearg has over 700m drop and its own hill area, albeit a small one. The proximity of celebrities Bidean nam Bian and Aonach Eagach leaves these hills underrated, as they do not have the allure of their neighbours. The forestry does not help matters, coating most of the lower slopes in blanket uniformity. Forest tracks penetrate up to about 300m, but dense trees constrain the choice of routes to summits.

The names do not help either. Why Sgorrs not Sgurrs, why Sgorr Dhearg not Sgurr Dearg? No wonder so many walkers gave up on Gaelic. The recent conversion by OS of nearby Sgor na h-Ulaidh to Sgurr na h-Ulaidh confirmed the suspicion that many spellings were arbitrary. I was once told that these Sgorrs were known as the Beinn a' Bheithir pair. The rhyme helped with pronunciation but left me puzzled because there were three hills in the pair.

Many times I had driven past and looked sideways at the wonderful-looking ridge above Ballachulish that appears to lead directly to the third of the pair, Sgorr Bhan. However, when I realised there were actually seven summits in the pair, I tried to figure out how to climb all seven in one walk. In the end I decided to give priority to the lower four that I had not climbed before, starting from South Ballachulish and heading up toward the long, curving western arm of Sgorr Dhonuill.

But how to get to Creag Ghorm, that was the problem. I worked out a route, set off and soon screwed it up, because I was constrained by the forest and tempted by a rough path through the trees that went in the wrong direction. I then made a hash of a rising traverse through cliffs and gullies, wasted time messing about on some precarious ledges and ended up too high and well south of where I was aiming for. Not a good start for a long day. It meant walking 2km north to Creag Ghorm and all the way back. The going was good on the broad, rocky ridge but there were lots of undulations, so surveying the four summits and cols consumed most of the afternoon.

The walking got even better as I climbed higher up to Sgorr Dhonuill, but I was concerned that I would not have time to get to the seventh summit, Sgorr Bhan. The weather was good and so were the views, but there was a big drop down to the next col and then a climb of 267m up to Sgorr Dhearg. The sensible thing was to go down from there, but Sgorr Bhan looked so close and so appealing in the low evening sunlight. I had descended in the dark lots of times before so surely I could do it again, but the problem here was steepness of angle and unknown terrain. Just how steep was the ridge that I had admired from the road? The contours were tightly packed. I might end up descending far more quickly than I would like, and thick July vegetation could be most unpleasant low down in the dark. I didn't fancy it, so I went back up Sgorr Dhearg as I reckoned it ought to offer a better descent route. It was 10pm by the

time I reached the summit for a second time and set off down the north ridge. This looked an obvious way down. Surely there must be some sort of path to link the ridge to the end of the forest track 300m up. Once I reached the track, all would be well.

The ridge was fine for a while but I could not see a path even if there was one, so I used GPS to aim for the point where the end of the forest track ought to be and plunged down toward the tree-line. The good news was that most of the trees above the track had been felled on this side of the glen. The bad news was that the debris and terrain left behind were worse than the trees. The ground was awful. I stumbled down over stumps and lumps and roots through thigh-high grass and unstable piles of loose branches. The distance was not far but it was steep and slow and unpleasantly dark. It was one of my worst descents ever, and I had plenty of horrors to compare it with.

I had had a great walk from Creag Ghorm to Sgorr Bhan but now I was paying the price. Perhaps I had been too ambitious, surveying seven summits and six cols in one day. Why did I keep on getting into these horrible situations? Because it was worth it, I suppose. What was 45 minutes of desperate struggle compared to ten hours of good walking and successful surveying? That wasn't what I thought while I was floundering through the felled hell, but it was how I rationalised the suffering after reaching the wonderfully flat and safe forest track.

By the time I got back to the car shortly before midnight, I had almost convinced myself that it had been a great day. After I got home it became even better when I found out that Sgorr Dhonuill Far West Top had over 30m drop. It was not a high hill but it was an excellent rocky peak. Surely it had been worth a bit of suffering to discover such a fine addition to the set. I would not go down that way again though, not in the dark, not in daylight, not ever. Once was more than enough. Great hills, shame about the forestry.

Stob Dubh, Buachaille Etive Beag, with Ben Starav to the left

EL01 Skiddaw-knott

OS map: 90 Key col: 225m at NY370305

Number	Height	Name	Drop	Location	Summit
2319	931	**Skiddaw**	706	NY 2604 2908	Rock by trig
2321	865	Skiddaw Little Man	61	NY 2667 2779	Rock by cairn
2320	867.8	**Blencathra**	461	NY 3234 2771	Outcrop

Blencathra

High pressure at Easter usually means heading north for high hills, but I was heading south, to Oxfordshire for a niece's wedding. The weather forecast was looking good for the big day. I hoped to benefit as well, so I broke the journey in Cumbria.

Blencathra is the first high hill that comes into view west of the M6, so I aimed for that. It is an impressive hulk of a hill, with a pleasing profile and a fine row of parallel ridges above the road. I expected it to be busy and it was, but my afternoon start meant it never felt crowded. I had missed the rush hours and had the uphill lane to myself. I counted 41 adults on their way down, accompanied by eleven children and seven dogs.

A fragment of conversation caught my ear as I passed by. '*Imagine grandma on that*', said a young girl to her adult, looking across to the sharp profile of the cannily-named Sharp Edge. I suspected I was older than the grandma in question, but didn't mention I was thinking of coming down that way. I was in a good mood but they did not need me to intrude.

My mood was even better when I reached the summit. The hazy view was all right, but the highlights were no people and no cairn. It was my lucky day. I had one every decade. I set up my equipment on a low pole by the summit outcrop, a few metres from the pristine concrete ring left recently by OS surveyors.

Several minutes passed before the first interlopers appeared. Sam, Laura, Dylan and Reef were good company for a few minutes, full of youthful enthusiasm. Sam enquired about the height of Blencathra and was pleased to learn it was only 110m lower than Scafell Pike. Seven-year-old Dylan was interested too. '*I'm going to climb them all*', he announced, while jumping up and down on one leg. By 'all' he meant three, for he was referring to the highest hill in England, in Scotland and in Wales. I didn't tell him there were over a thousand high hills. He could learn about that later. Sam wanted to know though. He had lived in St Andrews for a few years but confessed that he had never climbed a single hill in Scotland. '*No shame in that*', I said, '*when I was your age I had hardly climbed any either*'. His excuses were better than mine. Two of them were running around on the rocks and having fun in the sun. Summits in the Monadhliath were never like this. Even an old grump who liked solitude had to concede that it was a pleasure to observe.

Before the family left, I asked whether they would mind being mentioned if I ever wrote an account of Blencathra. It is unlikely they will read it, but it seemed courteous to check. The only other person who appeared on top during my summit patrol was a wizened runner who stayed for the few seconds it took to answer '*57 minutes and 30 seconds*' to my question about his time, then he turned around and retraced his strides. Now that was more like the Highlands.

I was not sure that I had been to Gategill Fell Top, so I wandered over to eliminate it from my enquiries. This is the

other side of the saddle that gives the hill its distinctive profile and alternative name of Saddleback, now rarely used. Its cliff-edge summit was high enough to be eligible but its 18m drop left it 1.4m short of qualification. Few of those reaching the main summit seemed to bother with it. I then disgraced myself by surveying a summit with under 15m drop, because I knew the result would be of interest to some. Knowe Crags looked the way it sounded. By the time I returned to the main summit, Emma had been there and left a stone on top of the OS ring, inscribed with her name. I decided that other people did not need to know that and despatched the new deposit to a less obtrusive location a stone's throw away.

After thinking about the imagined grandma getting into difficulties on Sharp Edge, I realised I had little desire to join her, as I had been that way before. Instead, I indulged my lazy self by returning the way I had gone up, descending entirely in daylight, then relaxing with a pint outside the White Horse Inn. It all felt so civilised around here, with well-behaved children, real paths, real sunshine, real ale and real enjoyment. It was far removed from my usual experience of hill walking in Scotland. I could see why so many people were drawn to the area and could feel the seductive allure of this land of little lakes.

As I changed socks and footwear while waiting for vegetable curry to appear on the rustic table by the rustic wall overlooking the rustic road, I thought I could easily get used to this relaxed lifestyle. It would be like joining a large, comfortable cult. A few sips of the local brew revived my rationality and I reminded myself that the area was far too small, far too busy and had far too few high hills for my taste. It was pleasant to visit these parts occasionally, but the Highlands and islands were my home ground, for at least 974 reasons.

Blencathra

High Hills by Height

All heights with decimal points are from GNSS surveys by Alan Dawson except:
G=G&J Surveys, L=Lidar, M=Myrddyn Phillips, O=OS height, T=Height derived from OS archive of triangulation points

Name	*Area Id*	*Height*	_____ 51-100 _____		
Ben Nevis	HC01	1344.7	Ben Cruachan	HC11	1127.0
Ben Macdui	HE02	1309.3	An Riabhachan East Top	HW09	1125.0
Braeriach	HE01	1295.5	Mullach Lochan nan Gabhar	HE03	1124.0
Ben Macdui North Top	HE02	1294.2	Stob Coire na Ceannain	HC01	1123.5
Cairn Toul	HE01	1292.4	Meall Garbh	HC15	1123.1
Carn na Criche	HE01	1265.6	Beinn a' Ghlo - Carn nan Gabhar	HE09	1121.9
Sgor an Lochain Uaine	HE01	1258.0	Clach Choutsaich	HE03	1121.2
Stob Coire Sputan Dearg	HE02	1250.5	Fiacaill Coire an t-Sneachda	HE02	1120.4
Cairn Gorm	HE02	1244.8	Carn Etchachan	HE02	1120
Aonach Beag	HC01	1234.2	A' Chraileag	HW12	1119.2
Carn Mor Dearg	HC01	1221.1	Stuc Gharbh Mhor	HE03	1119.2
Carn Dearg (North)	HC01	1220.8	Ben Avon South Tor	HE03	1118.9
Aonach Mor	HC01	1220.4	An Stuc	HC15	1117.1
Stob Coire an t-Saighdeir	HE01	1215.0	Stob Coire an Laoigh	HC01	1116.7
Ben Lawers	HC15	1214.3	Sgor Gaoith	HE01	1116.0
Cairn Lochan	HE02	1214.0	Aonach Beag	HC04	1115.8
Beinn a' Bhuird	HE03	1196.0	Stob Coire nan Lochan	HC08	1115.6
Sron na Lairige	HE01	1184.1	Stob Coire Easain	HC01	1115
Beinn Mheadhoin	HE02	1182.9	Sron Riach	HE02	1113.7
Carn Eighe	HW10	1182.8	Monadh Mor	HE01	1113
Carn Dearg Meadhonach	HC01	1179.7	Tom a' Choinnich	HW10	1112.7
Mam Sodhail	HW10	1179.4	Sgoran Dubh Mor	HE01	1111.0
Beinn a' Bhuird South Top	HE03	1179	Carn a' Choire Bhoidheach	HE12	1109.9
Stob Choire Claurigh	HC01	1178.3	Beinn Bhrotain East Top	HE01	1109.8
Stob Coire an t-Sneachda	HE02	1176.0	Ciste Dhubh	HW10	1109.5
Ben More	HS08	1173.9	Sgurr nan Conbhairean	HW12	1109.1
Cnap a' Chleirich	HE03	1172.6	Sgurr Mor	HW03	1108.9
Ben Avon	HE03	1172.0	Meall a' Bhuiridh	HC10	1107.9
Stob Binnein	HS08	1164.8	Creagan a' Choire Etchachan	HE02	1107.2
Beinn Mheadhoin South Top	HE02	1163	Stob Coire nam Beith	HC08	1106.9
Beinn Bhrotain	HE01	1157.1	Caisteal	HC01	1106.8
Derry Cairngorm	HE02	1155.8	Stob an t-Sluichd	HE03	1106.7
Lochnagar - Cac Carn Beag	HE12	1155.7	Stob a' Choire Mheadhoin	HC01	1105
Sgurr na Lapaich	HW09	1151.9	Sron Bealach Beithe	HC04	1104
Cac Carn Mor	HE12	1151.3	Beinn Ghlas	HC15	1103.4
Sgurr nan Ceathramhnan	HW10	1149.7	Beinn Eibhinn	HC04	1103.3
Bidean nam Bian	HC08	1149.4	Stob Dearg	HC11	1103.1
Ben Alder	HC04	T1147.7	Stob Coire Bhealaich	HC01	1101.0
Stob a' Choire Dhomhain	HW10	1146.5	Mullach Fraoch-choire	HW12	1100.9
Sgurr nan Ceathramhnan West Top	HW10	1142.3	Creise	HC10	1099.8
Bidean nam Bian West Top	HC08	1141.1	Clach Leathad	HC10	1099.0
Stob Coire Dhomhnuill	HW10	1139.1	Sgurr a' Mhaim	HC02	1099
Ben Avon North Tor	HE03	1137.7	Sgurr Choinnich Mor	HC01	1094
Ben Avon West Top	HE03	1137.6	Sgurr nan Clach Geala	HW03	T1093.1
Geal-charn	HC04	1132	Sgurr nan Clachan Geala	HW09	1092.8
Ben Lui	HS03	1131.4	Bynack More	HE02	1090.4
Sron Garbh	HW10	1131	Stob Ghabhar	HC10	1089.2
Binnein Mor	HC02	1129.4	Carn Eas	HE03	1089
Creag Meagaidh	HM01	1128.1	Beinn a' Chlachair	HC04	1087.8
An Riabhachan	HW09	1127.7	Snowdon	WN02	O1084.8

101-155			156-210		
Sgurr a' Choire Ghlais	HW08	1083.7	Creag an Fhithich	HC15	1045.7
Schiehallion	HC13	1083.3	Stob Coire an Albannaich	HC10	1044.9
Beinn a' Chaorainn	HE03	1083.3	Carn an t-Sagairt Beag	HE12	1044.3
Cuidhe Crom	HE12	1083.2	Carnedd Dafydd	WN04	1044
Stob Coire Cath na Sine	HC01	1082.4	Meall nan Tarmachan	HC15	1043.6
Stob Coire Etchachan	HE02	1082	Beinn Iutharn Mhor	HE10	1043.5
Beinn Dearg	HN07	1081.7	Carn Mairg	HC13	1043.0
Stob Coire Easain	HC01	1081.5	Beinn a' Chaorainn North Top	HM01	1042.9
Beinn a' Chreachain	HC12	1080.6	Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill East Top	HW01	1042.8
Ben Starav	HC10	1079.5	Stuc Mor	HW10	1041
Beinn Sheasgarnaich	HC14	1077.4	Sgurr na Ciche	HW16	1040.2
Stuc Bheag	HW10	1075	Meall Ghaordaidh	HC15	1039.8
Beinn Dorain	HC12	1074.5	An Riabhachan West Top	HW09	1039.8
An Tudair	HW10	1073.4	Sgurr a' Bhealaich Dheirg	HW11	1039.1
Stob Coire Sgreamhach	HC08	1071.6	Na Gruagaichean North Top	HC02	1038.8
Puist Coire Ardair	HM01	1070.8	Beinn Achaladair	HC12	1038.6
Braigh Coire Chruinn-bhalgain	HE09	1070.1	Sgurr na Lapaich	HW10	1037.3
Stob an Chul-Choire	HC01	1070.1	Carn a' Mhaim	HE02	1037
An Socach	HW09	1069.6	Gleouraich	HW14	1035.1
Sgurr Fhuaran	HW11	1068.8	Carn Dearg	HC04	1034
Glas Maol	HE11	1067.7	Beinn Fhada	HW11	1031.9
Stob Coire an Lochain	HS08	1067.3	Am Bodach	HC02	1031.8
Meall Corranaich	HC15	1067.2	Stony Seat	HW01	1031.5
Crib y Ddysgl	WN02	G1065.4	Creag Ghorm a' Bhealaich	HW08	1030.3
Carn Sasunnaich	HC12	1064.7	Ben Oss	HS03	1029.8
Carnedd Llewelyn	WN04	1064	Carn an Righ	HE10	1029.6
Cairn of Claise	HE11	1063.1	Carn Gorm	HC13	1029.5
Ciste Dhubh East Top	HW10	1062.9	Meall Coire Choille-rais	HM01	1028.0
An Teallach - Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill	HW01	1062.6	Sgor Iutharn	HC04	1028
Airgiod Bheinn	HE09	1061.7	Sgurr na Ciste Duibhe	HW11	1027
Binnein Mor South Top	HC02	1060.6	Meall Garbh	HC15	1026.7
An Socach East Top	HW09	1060.0	Sgurr a' Mhaoraich	HW13	1026.6
Sgurr Fiona	HW01	1058.7	Ben Challuim	HC14	1025.0
Creag Coire nan Each	HW10	1055	Drochaid Ghlas	HC11	1024.4
Liathach - Spidean a' Choire Leith	HW04	1054.8	Beinn a' Bheithir - Sgorr Dhearg	HC07	1024.2
Na Gruagaichean	HC02	1054.3	Mullach an Rathain	HW04	1023.9
Toll Creagach	HW10	1053.7	Sron Garbh	HC04	1023.9
Sgurr a' Chaorachain	HW07	T1053.1	West Meur Gorm Craig	HE03	1023.1
Creag an Leth-choin	HE02	1052.6	Buachaille Etive Mor - Stob Dearg	HC08	1021.4
Stob Poite Coire Ardair	HM01	1052.5	Ladhar Bheinn	HW15	1020
An Leth-chreag	HW10	1051.7	Carn Dearg (South)	HC01	1020
Glas Tulaichean	HE10	1051.4	Aonach air Chrith	HW13	1019.5
Carn Ban Mor	HE01	1050.5	Mullach Clach a' Bhlair	HE01	1019.0
Geal Charn	HC04	1049.7	Beinn Bheoil	HC04	1019
Sgurr Fhuar-thuill	HW08	1049.2	Carn an Tuirc	HE11	1018.8
Beinn a' Chaorainn	HM01	1049.1	A' Choinneach	HE02	1017.1
Beinn a' Chaorainn South Top	HM01	1048.5	Sgurr Creag an Eich	HW01	1016.4
Chno Dearg	HC03	1047.5	Beinn a' Chaorainn Bheag	HE03	1016.0
Corrag Bhuidhe	HW01	1047.2	Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair	HW02	1015.2
Carn an t-Sagairt Mor	HE12	1047.0	Sgurr na Fearstaig	HW08	1014.8
Mullach Fraoch-choire East Top	HW12	1046.9	Stacan Dubha	HE02	1014
Creag Mhor	HC14	1046.8	Meall Liath	HC13	1013.7
Bidean an Eoin Deirg	HW07	1046.6	Garbh Chioch Mhor	HW16	1012.9
Ben Wyvis - Glas Leathad Mor	HN08	T1046.4	Beinn Ime	HS04	1012.2
Cruach Ardrain	HS08	1045.9	The Saddle	HW13	1011.5

Measuring the Cuillin

I had never been interested in attempting the entire Cuillin ridge in one day. I knew it would be too difficult and mentally draining for me, so I would not enjoy it. I was not interested in the challenge of it or in feeling that I was on a schedule. I was keen to reach all the summits but I wanted to avoid those sections of the ridge that would be too difficult or frightening for me to attempt on my own.

I was not the first hill walker to carry out detailed surveying in the Cuillin. In 1923, Guy Barlow reported that, on his second surveying attempt, his 'outfit' included: '*a light mountain theodolite, two pocket levels, a new aneroid, a steel tape, and other gear*.' He spent three days surveying Sgurr Thearlaich, Sgurr Alasdair and Sgurr Sgumain, '*repeating the aneroid observations and using also a simple levelling method*'. He could not measure altitude but his measurements of relative height were pretty accurate. For example, he found the difference in height between Sgurr Sgumain and Sgurr Alasdair to be '*147 feet instead of 205 feet, an error of 58 feet in the Ordnance Survey*.' The actual figure is 145 feet.

The notes below summarise my experiences of surveying summits and cols on the Cuillin ridge, in chronological order, from the perspective of a wary hill walker who enjoys unroped scrambling on dry rock in reasonable weather but is not a climber.

Knight's Peak

In September 2013 I joined several members of The Munro Society to assist with its Heightings project to survey summits close to 3000 feet. I had been up Knight's Peak on my own two years earlier, so I suggested the same route, via Coire Riabhach then up some grassy ledges and round to an awkward bit at the top of the scree gully that separates Knight's Peak from Sgurr nan Gillean. It seemed more intimidating in mist than when I had been there in better weather. My role on the day was to sit on top for two hours and hang on to my finely-balanced equipment to stop it falling off, while the G&J Surveys team were established on the western summit, which turned out to be 10cm higher. This outing is described in detail by Myrddyn Phillips in The Munro Society's book *Scaling The Heights*.

I reckoned that Knight's Peak was easier than some walkers thought, as I had climbed it via four different routes, though I had also failed once (from Coire Bhasteir). I found the easiest way to be from the north, without having to climb all of Pinnacle Ridge to get there. Moving between the twin summits of Knight's Peak is rather awkward, but now that we know which is higher, it is no longer necessary. Continuing south to its col is fairly easy on the zigzag ledges, but the easiest way down from there is probably over Sgurr nan Gillean.

Sgurr a' Bhasteir, Sgurr a' Fionn Choire and the Bhasteir Tooth

Two days after the Knight's Peak survey, some of us met up again on top of the Bhasteir Tooth. The G&J Surveys team measured its summit and I did the col. The route up Sgurr a' Bhasteir via its north ridge was straightforward and superb. Sgurr a' Fionn Choire was easier than it looked, a fine scramble. It was my fourth ascent of the Bhasteir Tooth and it seemed a little harder each time, but it was still feasible unroped via the easiest line from Lota Corrie. I looked at the evil grinning teeth of the rock ledge on the way up to Am Basteir and found it hard to believe I had climbed up that way several years earlier. I was wary of Am Basteir and did not try to survey its summit. I went hunting for its col on the way down but it looked too difficult to reach and too overhung to get enough satellite signals. Failure was part of the Cuillin experience.

Caisteal a' Garbh-choire, Sgurr nan Eag, Sgurr a' Choire Bhig, Gars-bheinn

The southern part of the Cuillin ridge is reckoned to be one of the easier sections, but light snow in May 2014 added extra spice that wasn't needed. I had read that Caisteal a' Garbh-choire was for rock climbers only, but I decided to investigate it anyway. From the col to the south I tried a promising-looking ledge, met a vertical dead end, went back to the col and tried a different ledge. Within a few minutes I was on the summit, via a little gully in the middle of the face overlooking Loch Coire a' Ghrunnda. The gully was steep but felt secure, with little exposure. I went back down to show Iain the way and we were soon relaxing together on the magnificent summit and enjoying the astounding situation, while my equipment collected its vital data. We went down the same way as it was our only option. Iain had brought a short rope but we managed without needing it.

The col was difficult, located next to the vertical east end of the castle, where it was impossible to pick up the minimum five satellites. The solution was to move the antenna further away from the castle wall, where reception was slightly better, but that meant having to measure the vertical distance of over three metres from equipment to col, with the aid of laser level and metal tape. A valid reading was obtained and showed the drop to be over 30m, but the margin of error for antenna height was higher than usual.

Sgurr nan Eag was awkward in the sleety snow. I found that a boulder was about as high as the recognised summit, but it was hard to be certain in the conditions. The snow soon stopped and the rest of the route offered classic ridge walking, with a dramatically narrow survey point at the col for Sgurr a' Choire Bhig. There was a superb cloudscape from the top of Gars-bheinn, but the first part of the path back round its base was awful.

An Caisteal, Bidein Druim nan Ramh, Sgurr a' Mhadaidh Far East Top

Iain and I set off from Glen Brittle past the crowds on the Fairy Pools path, went up into Coire a' Tairneilear and scrambled up the buttress to the top of An Caisteal. The ridge had a few little gaps and the summit felt exposed. I did not attempt to survey it. We retraced our steps and jumps to the col, then skirted round the base of Bidein Druim nan Ramh on its north-west side, as we knew it would be too hard for us to climb directly from the north. We climbed the west top, sat down by an odd warty knob, looked across to the main summit of Bidein Druim nan Ramh and did not fancy it at all. There was a nasty-looking dip to the col then a steep wall with no obvious line of weakness. I had more or less talked us out of it, told myself it was not important, when a guide and client came along. They roped up to get down to the exposed col then moved right and climbed a broken part of the wall to reach easier ground. I had not spotted that line and somehow it looked feasible after watching the pair in front climb it so quickly. We got up, slithered down to the col and followed their line. It was a little easier than it looked and we came down the same way, while the other pair abseiled off to the north. I left my rucksack and equipment on the west top, as my priority was to reach the summit, not survey it. I found Bidein Druim nan Ramh to be one of the five most challenging summits on Skye, along with the In Pinn, Clach Glas, Am Basteir and Sgurr a' Mhadaidh East Top.

We carried on to Sgurr a' Mhadaidh Far East Top via an excellent line below the crest on the north side. We went no further and returned down the crest of the ridge. I managed one more survey on the way down, 689.2m Sgurr an Fheadhain. The day was a partial success, with three new summits climbed, but a partial failure with only one of the three surveyed. If I had known in 2014 that An Caisteal and Bidein Druim nan Ramh would one day appear in a list of high hills, I might have made more effort to measure them.

On the easy route up Caisteal a' Garbh-choire

Summit of Caisteal a' Garbh-choire, with Sgurr Sgumain, Sgurr Thearlaich and Sgurr Alasdair beyond

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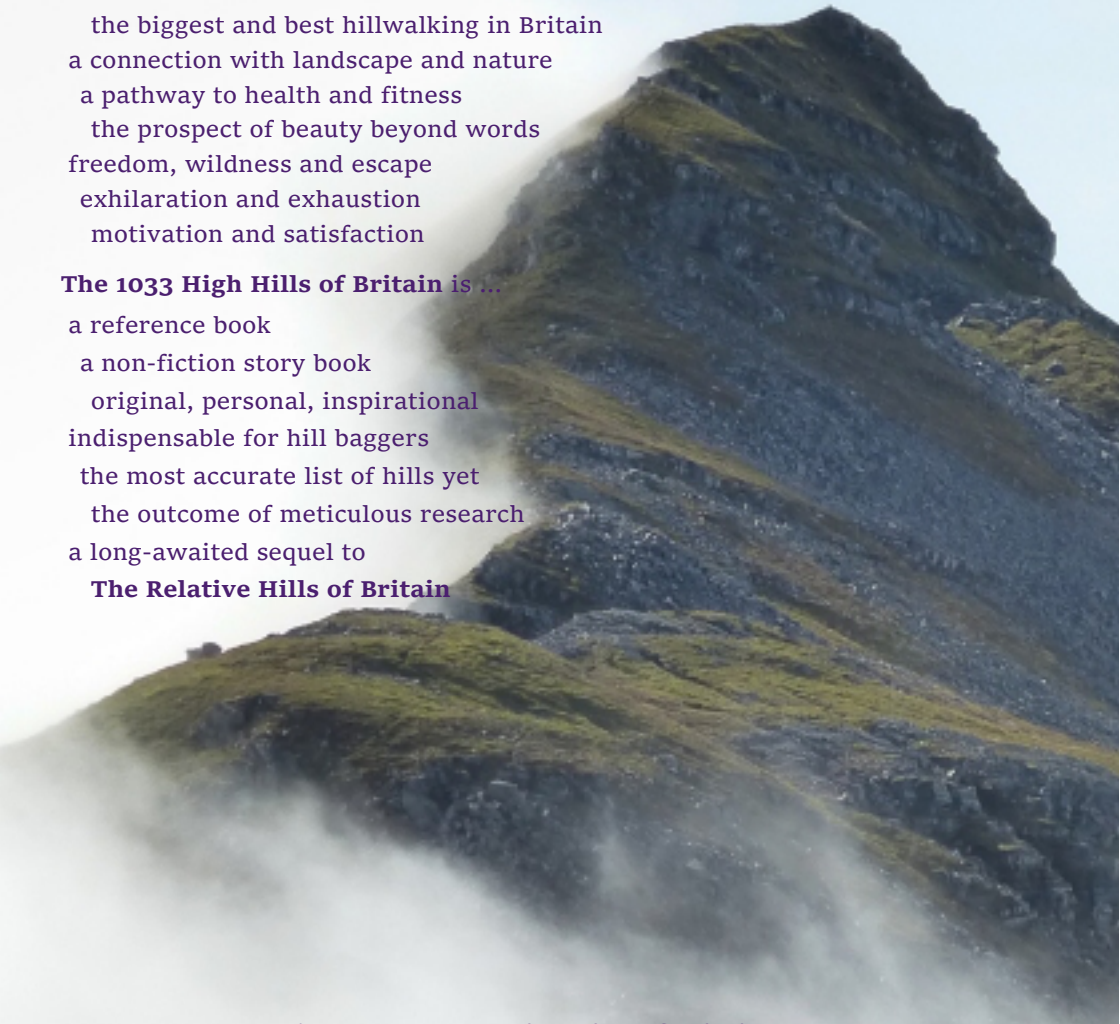

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