

WALKING IN THE CAIRNGORMS



About the Author

Ronald Turnbull (seen here at the Shelter Stone) is based in southern Scotland, with a particular interest in long backpacking trips through the Highlands. He first slept under the Shelter Stone above Loch Avon in June 1988, and was impressed not only by the situation and the view but by the way it snowed on him overnight. However, his connection with the Cairngorms goes back further. He only exists because the ice of Loch Avon, crossed during a thaw by a direct ancestor, did not collapse.

He writes frequently for the main UK walking magazines; his previous book for Cicerone, *The Book of the Bivvy*, won the Outdoor Writers' Guild Award for best outdoor book 2002. He has completed the 42-peak Bob Graham Round in the Lake District, and also likes hot, rocky, Spanish-speaking bits of Europe. For this book he has particularly enjoyed the rambles through Badenoch and Rothiemurchus Forest, and revisiting all four of the Lochans Uaine.

Other Cicerone guides by the author

Ben Nevis and Glen Coe

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the Trossachs*

Walking the Jurassic Coast

WALKING IN THE CAIRNGORMS

by Ronald Turnbull

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Front cover: Ryvoan Bothy and Bynack More (Route 13)

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Thanks to the Ordnance Survey and Harveys for supplying up-to-date mapping; and to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish National Heritage for the 2005 access law and code.

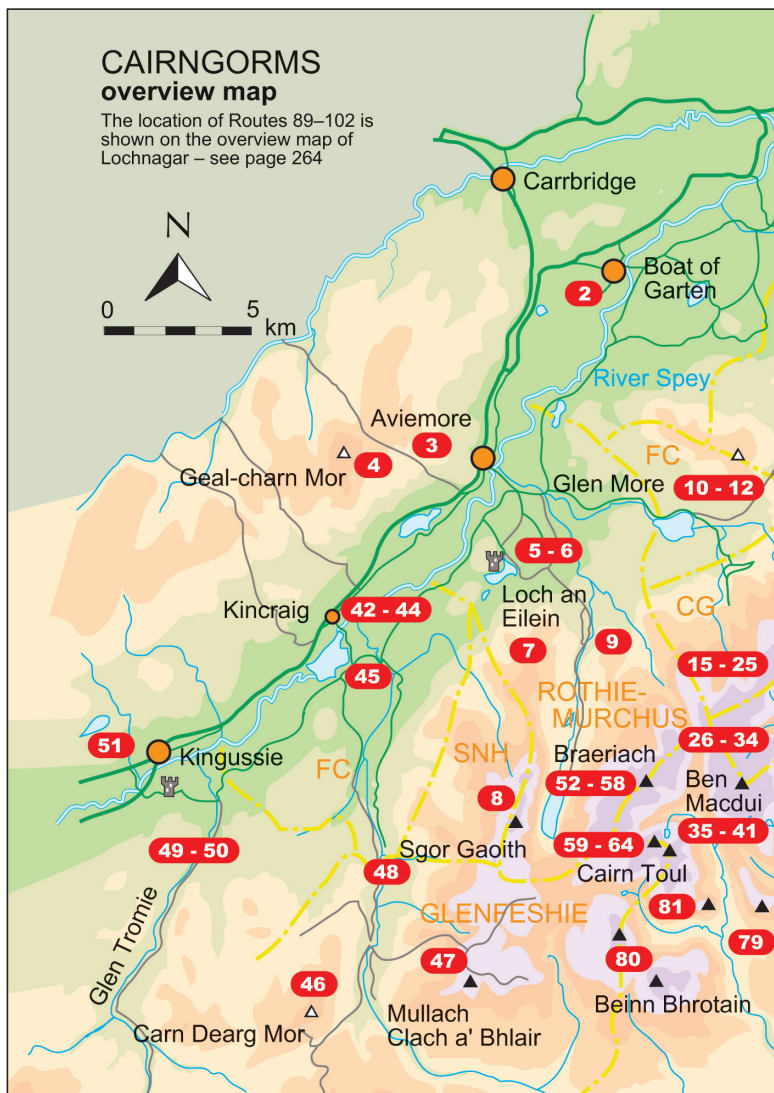
This book is dedicated to the hill folk of my family: to Thomas, for posing on crag tops all the way across; to Barbara and Matt for reassurance (and on Pygmy Ridge a rope as well) on many of the scrambles; and to my father, not just for ancestral word-of-mouth Gaelic, but for suggesting the best route here, number 34.

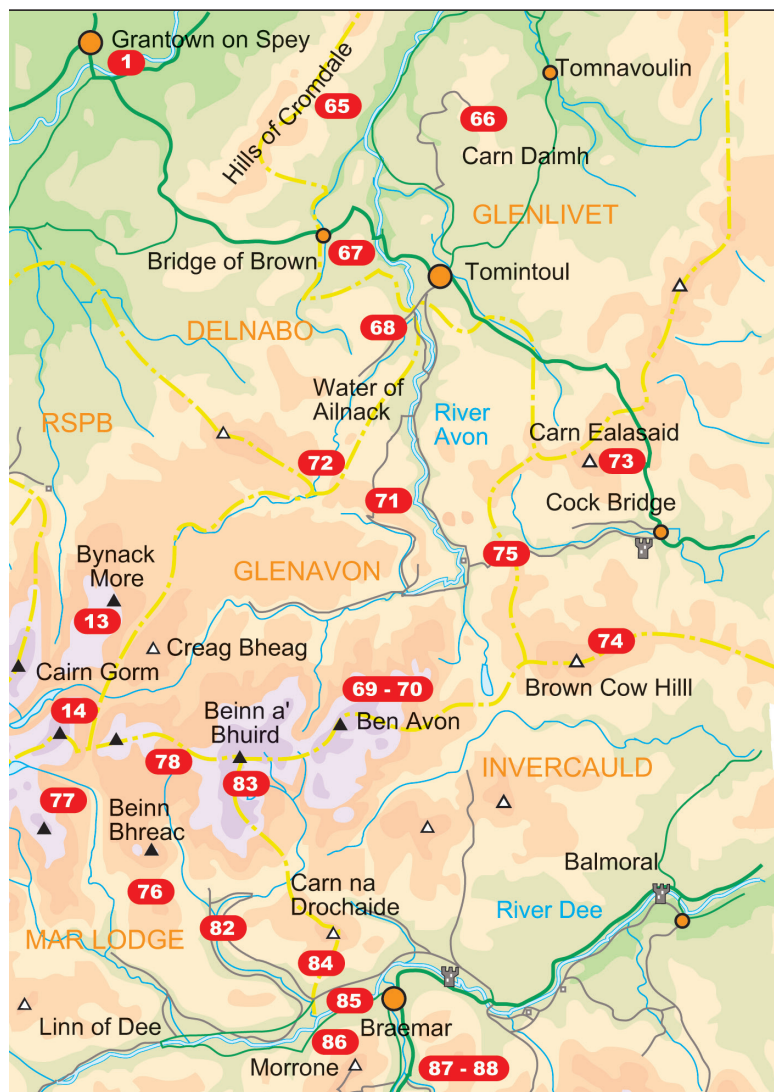
*From afar the Cairngorms appear gently rounded.
Close up, you find the Corrie of Lochnagar (Route 100)*



CAIRNGORMS overview map

The location of Routes 89–102 is shown on the overview map of Lochnagar – see page 264



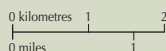


Symbols used on 1:100,000 route maps

	route
	variants, and adjacent routes
	on overview maps, estate boundaries (see Appendix B: Access)
	start point
	finish point
	start/finish point
	route number
	variant number
	parking (typically at walk start)
	bike drop-off point, on walks that can be started on bike
	building
	bothy
	Munro
	other summit of interest: on overview maps, the Corbetts
	castle

Contour lines are drawn at
50m intervals and labelled
at 100m intervals.











SCALE: 1:100,000



Relief



Symbols used on 1:50,000 OS maps

	route
	route
	route
	route
	Speyside Way
	route number
	route number
	route number
	route number
	start/finish point

For OS symbols key see OS maps

Mountain Warning

Mountain walking can be a dangerous activity carrying a risk of personal injury or death. It should be undertaken only by those with a full understanding of the risks and with the training and experience to evaluate them. While every care and effort has been taken in the preparation of this guide, the user should be aware that conditions can be highly variable and can change quickly, materially affecting the seriousness of a mountain walk. Therefore, except for any liability which cannot be excluded by law, neither Cicerone nor the author accept liability for damage of any nature (including damage to property, personal injury or death) arising directly or indirectly from the information in this book.

To call out the **Mountain Rescue**, ring 999 or the international emergency number 112: this will connect you via any available network. Once connected to the emergency operator, ask for Police.



*Waterfall above Lochan Uaine of
Derry Cairngorm (Route 77)*

INTRODUCTION

CAIRNGORMS: THE HIGHS AND THE LOWS

The Cairngorms are Britain's biggest hills, above the 900m mark for 30km (if you discount a couple of glacier-gouged gaps). Here are 18 Munros (3000-footers, as listed by Sir Hugh Munro in 1891) linked by a high granite plateau that's unique in these islands.

With so many fine mountains, it may seem odd that I should be writing a book just as much about the low places of this high ground.

The first time I walked eastwards out of Kincaig and along the River Spey, I wasn't expecting to enjoy it. I was tired, I had very sore feet, I was carrying

15kg, and I'd just spent five days coming across the tops of some of the finest mountains in western Scotland.

But my bad feet – and even the wonders of the high-level west – were knocked out by the beauty of the birch trees. The path switch-backed above the river, sometimes just glimpsing it between the branches, sometimes looking across its wide brightness to miles and miles of forest and the dun-coloured hump of Braeriach.

When the following dawn brought the sound of birches beating in a gale, I abandoned my plateau ambitions. Instead I walked for a morning through the pine and juniper of Rothiemurchus. Between the wet tree trunks, lochans

Across Rothiemurchus Forest to Cairn Lochan and the Lairig Ghru



SPEYSIDE

1 Grantown and Spey



Length



Difficulty



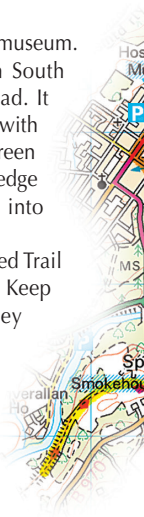
Start/finish	Grantown-on-Spey NJ035280
Distance	12km/7.5 miles
Ascent	70m/200ft
Time	3hr
Terrain	Tracks and paths
Max altitude	210m

A planned town, a military bridge, an interesting glacio-fluvial feature, and a tree for hanging people on: but the real point of this walk is the great Spey and the pinewood. Grantown dates from the 17th century, and was built by James Grant. The little museum at the walk start provides the history, and also has a stuffed wildcat.

Start at the car park beside Grantown's small museum. From the bottom of the car park turn left in South Street, and at once right into Golf Course Road. It becomes a tarred track across the golf course, with the clubhouse (CH on the map) on the left. At green buildings, the track bends left along the forest edge and in a few yards a gate on the right leads into the forest.

Take the wide path ahead, soon with the Red Trail and Spey Way markers joining from the right. Keep on the main track, following the red and Spey waymarks to bear left at the next junction. With a stream and a new fence on the left, the Red Trail turns away to the right; but take the main track and Spey Way which continue ahead through a gateway, to emerge from the forest.

At a track junction, bear right through a small gate. The path beyond reaches a track,

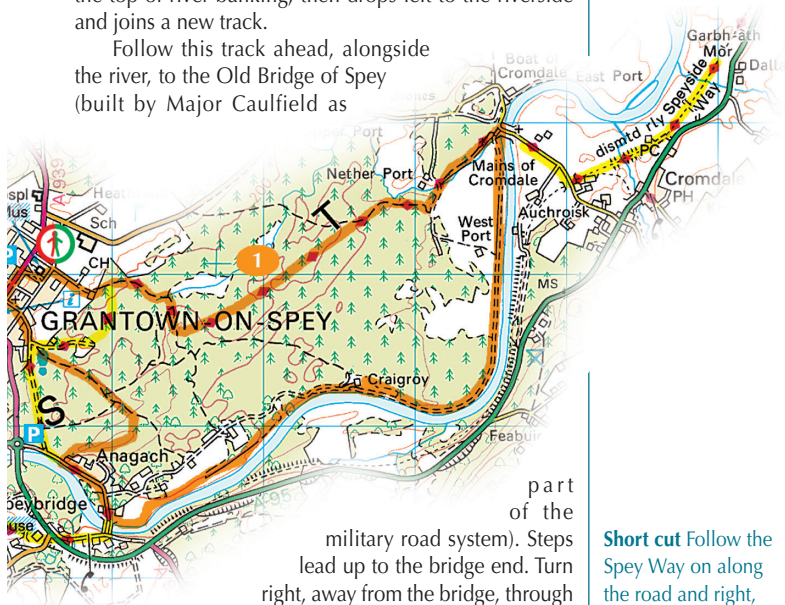


runs alongside it briefly, then exits onto it. Cromdale Bridge and church are just ahead, and worth a visit, with a signboard at the church explaining the small battle that took place in 1690 on the Heughs of Cromdale opposite.

Return across Cromdale Bridge and back into the track, following it through a gate and across a small bridge. It runs alongside the Spey, and after 2km re-enters the forest at a balconied fishers' hut. It passes under gloomy trees, then runs back out to the river, and becomes a green path that rises up the riverbank to a house, **Craigroy**.

Join the exit track from this house, out through a gate. Take the track ahead for 300m, as it bends away from the river, then back left to the river again. As the track again bends away right, keep ahead on a small path. It follows the top of river banking, then drops left to the riverside and joins a new track.

Follow this track ahead, alongside the river, to the Old Bridge of Spey (built by Major Caulfield as



part of the military road system). Steps lead up to the bridge end. Turn right, away from the bridge, through **Anagach** settlement (Speybridge on Explorer map). ▶ Immediately after the last house, turn right

Short cut Follow the Spey Way on along the road and right, up the military track, into Granttown.

The Spey below Grantown



up a narrow path into the woods, past a collapsed bench, to a path just above. Here turn right, on a combined Red/Blue Trail. The path runs along the top of a stony ridge – an esker – within the forest. After 500m, fork left with a red-blue waymark, and in another 50m at a path T-junction, turn left following the blue pole.

ESKERS

An esker is the bed of a river that once ran under an ice sheet. These glacial features, being totally enclosed within the ice, can run along the sides of valleys, uphill as well as down, and vanish at the point at which they returned into the body of the glacier.

In 200m the Green Trail joins from the left. Keep ahead – now Green/Blue – to pass either side of a tree in mid-path. This was the hanging tree where the bodies of executed criminals were placed on display. At the next junction, where Blue departs to the right, keep ahead on the Green Trail.

At a five-way junction, keep ahead northwest, on what – if it were a roundabout – would be second exit. You soon pass a reassuring green waymarker. Keep northwest across paths to emerge between two posts onto a track at the golf course edge. About 50m left is a car park, small and often full, with a trail map sign-board. Here turn up right on tarmac, going straight across a junction near the fire station, to arrive along the edge of the Square onto Grantown's elegant main street. Turn right, past the Square, looking out for a small passageway just past the Grant Arms Hotel. It leads down into the museum car park.

2 Spey at Boat of Garten

Start/finish	Boat of Garten NH946190
Distance	10km/6 miles
Ascent	100m/300ft
Time	2.5hr
Terrain	Paths and tracks
Max altitude	265m



Length



Difficulty



Rather like the previous route, this is a walk of pinewood and the River Spey. I walked them in one day and enjoyed them both. This one, in case you like your big river in small doses, has a short-cut variant that's a mere 5km/3 miles.