

CICERONE

WALKING

# THE MUNROS

Volume 2 - Northern Highlands  
and the Cairngorms



Steve Kew

# **WALKING THE MUNROS**

**VOLUME TWO:  
NORTHERN HIGHLANDS AND THE CAIRNGORMS**

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**VOLUME TWO:**  
**NORTHERN HIGHLANDS AND THE CAIRNGORMS**  
**by Steve Kew**

**CICERONE**

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### Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/1106/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1106/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency. However, we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: An Teallach from Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill

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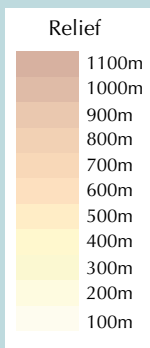
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## Symbols used on route maps

-  route
-  alternative route
-  start/finish point
-  direction of route
-  Munro summit
-  Munro top
-  building

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

SCALE: 1:100,000



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## 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 the police.



Descending Blaven's east ridge (Route 54)

## INTRODUCTION

There are 282 Munros – Scottish mountains that are over 3000 feet in height. That's a lot of cheese sandwiches. But setting out to reach every summit will take you to places of extraordinary beauty – places that thrill and challenge and inspire awe and wonder.

While small in scale, these are 'real' mountains; their locations are stunning and they offer an endless range of unforgettable sights and experiences for those who explore them. The pleasures awaiting the Munroist are many and varied. Navigating your way through the primeval wonderland of Scotland's mountain landscapes will put the rest of your life into a new perspective. There will be moments of great satisfaction, often in the midst of adversity; moments when you have unforgettable encounters with wildlife, and moments when friendships are forged through shared experience.

Climbing the Munros can also give you a richer understanding of the forces that have shaped this great landscape, and an appreciation of the lives of those hardy creatures and plants that depend upon it for their existence. It will perhaps introduce you to some of the great stories of Scottish history that have been played out in the Highlands. If you are lucky it might even give you a greater understanding of your own inner strengths and weaknesses, a discovery of where your own limits lie and

a chance to stretch yourself beyond them. There is a lot to be gained from walking the Scottish hills.

This guide – along with its companion volume – were the first complete and detailed route guides to all the Munros, designed with their waterproof jackets to be slipped into your back pocket on walks.

Let's be honest about it: doing the Munros is not as hard as it once was. The logistics are much easier now, for a start; within the lifetime of one generation many of the Highland roads have become wider, straighter and faster. Where once you had to wait until morning for a ferryman to arrive and take one or two cars across at a time, now there is a bridge. There are also more people walking the hills; routes are well established and danger points better understood.

A good safety net is also provided by mountain rescue teams across the country in the event of things going wrong. Route-finding is also much easier than it used to be, with a network of paths on most of the major hills where thousands of others have gone before. But – and it is a big but – climbing the Munros is still an adventure; one that will grip you and give you a fund of memories to last a lifetime. And when the weather turns bad there is just the same need as ever there was for sound



judgement, fortitude and navigational skill to bring you safely home.

The qualities required of the Munroist are not technically or even physically as demanding as those, say, of the rock climber or the high-altitude mountaineer (unless the routes are being done in winter conditions, in which case they can become a serious and arduous mountaineering undertaking). But a certain doggedness is nevertheless needed – the perseverance to see through a huge task – plus the skill and courage to navigate in conditions that can change all too rapidly in the Scottish hills. And this is not to mention a willingness to get wet, cold, shrouded in mist and buffeted by storms. If you only venture out when the sun is shining on the tops it may

take more than one lifetime to complete the round.

Some people may deride those who are working through the Munros, as if the act of ticking them off a list somehow corrupts an otherwise pure experience of mountaineering. In my experience the opposite is true. By accepting the challenge of doing them all you open yourself up to a host of new experiences, and you find yourself in a variety of mountain situations that you might never have otherwise experienced. Besides this, of the many accomplished and aspiring Munroists I know, I can think of none who confine their hillwalking just to the peaks that are on the list. I know of none who have not felt enriched by trying to complete the round.



*The eastern end of the South Shiel ridge from Route 31*



*On the descent of Sgurr na Sgine (Route 28)*

### THE MUNROS

What exactly are the Munros? I don't propose here to retell the history of this select group of hills. Suffice to say that Sir Hugh Munro's great idea of

climbing all the 3000ft mountains in Scotland has for over a century captured the imagination of everyone who loves mountains. In the popular imagination the Round of Munros includes

all the hills that are over 3000ft in height. Once you start climbing them, however, you quickly realize that this is not the whole story. There are many points where the land rises above 3000ft but is not regarded as a separate hill; or where it clearly is a separate hill, but it has still not been accorded the status of a Munro.

Sir Hugh's original list, drawn up in 1891, was rather different from the most recently updated version. Some revisions have taken place as a result of improvements in mapping. Sir Hugh, for example, rather conveniently believed that the Inaccessible Pinnacle was lower than Sgurr Dearg and so it was not originally listed as a Munro. Even today the latest satellite mapping techniques may reveal that the accepted heights of hills is wrong (usually only by the odd metre).

The Munro summit of Ben a' Chroin had to be redefined a couple of years ago because what was previously thought to be a lower Top nearly 1km away was found to be 1m higher than the classified summit. Similarly the respective heights of Beinn a' Chaorainn's three summits have recently been revised, and Ben Nevis itself is now officially 1m lower than it was a few years ago.

Successive revisions of the list by the Great and the Good have sought to declassify some hills and upgrade others, not just because their respective heights have been reassessed but also on the basis of their 'character' or 'remoteness', or whether it was felt that readers ought to be directed to one rather than another. There is not always an obvious logic to the hills that are in or out of the list at any

moment in time, and the list has been revised so often that it is in some danger of being discredited. There have been two recent revisions in which Sgurr nan Ceannaichean and Beinn a' Chlaidheimh were downgraded and these are now no longer deemed to be Munros. On the current list there are 282 Munros and 227 Tops.

Despite all the argument and lack of clarity about what makes a hill a Munro, and despite the all-too-frequent revisions, there is no doubting the fact that the underlying idea of the list makes sense to most people; it always has made sense and it probably always will. The list stands for something meaningful both to the hillwalker and to the public at large, and that something involves the idea that the Munros are all the highest hills in Scotland.

#### USING THE GUIDE

This guide is published in two volumes: volume one covering the southern Munros and volume two the northern peaks. In general the routes in volume two are listed from south to north. First listed are routes in the northern Cairngorms, then those on the northern side of Glen Spean/Glen Spey, and finally from Glen Finnan working northwards all the way up to Ben Hope. The 'area maps' at the front of the book place the Munros in their local context, and the overview map of Scotland locates them within the country as a whole.

*Sgurr an Lochain from Sgurr an Doire Leathain (Route 29)*



Some of the Northern Munros, such as those in Fisherfield and Letterewe, are particularly remote; some, most notably those on the Cuillin of Skye, involve scrambling on rock. Such demands may be new to the average hillwalker, and it is incumbent on them to make sure that they have the necessary judgement and skills to cope safely with these challenges (two useful mountain skills books are recommended in 'Difficulty', below).

The guide contains a special introduction to the Munros in the Cairngorms and to those on the Isle of Skye; this is to highlight the particular dangers that arise for hillwalkers in these areas. The introductions, which immediately precede the Cairngorm routes and Skye routes, should be



*Sunset on the Five sisters of Kintail (Route 30)*



## CAIRNGORMS: COYLUMBRIDGE

## ROUTE 9

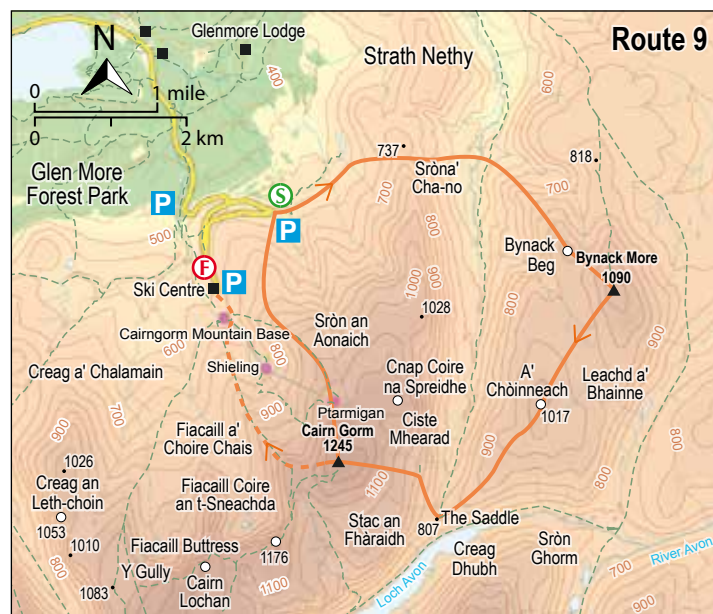
Bynack More (1090m),  
Cairn Gorm (1244m)

*Pronunciation:* Binnack More; Cairn Gorm

*Translation:* Big Chimney-pot or (possibly) Big Cap; Blue Cairn

<b>Start</b>	Across moorland from the car park
<b>Distance</b>	15km
<b>Ascent</b>	1320m
<b>Time</b>	6hr 10min
<b>Difficulty</b>	See the general introduction to the Cairngorms (above)
<b>Maps</b>	OS sheet 36; Explorer map 403; Harvey's Superwalker map Cairn Gorm; Area Map 6
<b>Parking</b>	Coire na Ciste car park
<b>Hostel</b>	YHA Loch Morlich; Aviemore
<b>B&amp;B/hotel</b>	Coylumbridge; Aviemore
<b>Camping</b>	Coylumbridge; Glenmore Forest
<b>Access</b>	Ranger's Office, tel 01479 861703 Abernethy Forest Reserve, tel 01429 821409

The northern corries of Cairn Gorm are areas of great despoliation by man – there are ski tows, tracks, buildings, huge car parks and a mountain railway to boot. It is hard to avoid these things in any ascent of Cairn Gorm, and yet when the ski tows and buildings have been left behind this is still a fine mountain. Perhaps the best approach is from the south or east, and this is possible when combined with the ascent of Bynack More as described here.



Start from the lower car park at the foot of Coire na Ciste and cross the Allt na Ciste burn. The footbridge is currently in disrepair but there are easy crossings so long as the burn is not in spate. Head across rough heather moorland to a low point on the skyline, just south of Point 737 and to the right of a small plantation (now felled but still clearly visible on the hillside). From the col a gully drops down to the east into Strath Nethy. Follow this down, keeping to either of the enclosing ridges – the gully itself is steep, wet, vegetated and full of awkward rocks. Cross the River Nethy at the bottom. The river flows in two separate streams at this point, separated by boggy ground, and both are usually easy to cross unless in spate. Clamber up the slope of thick heather on the other side until the vegetation becomes less dense and a sandy path materializes, making progress easier. Cross over Bynack Beg to the col below Bynack More at 03749



06623. From here it is an easy climb over bouldery ground to the rocky summit of **Bynack More**. The cairn, which is not immediately obvious, is near the southern end of the castellated summit ridge at 04192 06319 (2hr 40min).

Continue south past a series of granite tors that stand out along the south ridge above the Barns of Bynack like serrations on the spine of an ancient dragon, then turn southwest across a rather wet col, before pushing on over A' Chòinneach at 03210 04824. Drop down easily on the other side of A' Chòinneach over stony and bouldery ground to reach The Saddle at 01836 03312. This wonderful vantage point in the very heart of the Cairngorm massif offers a vista of crags and Munro summits across the black waters of Loch Avon that is one of the finest to be had. Cross The Saddle and look for a path that rises diagonally up the hillside to the north-northwest. (It is visible as you descend from A' Chòinneach.) Follow the path past the steep slabs at the foot of **Cairn Gorm's** southeastern flanks then, when these are cleared, head straight up due west to

*Bynack More across  
Strath Nethy*



the summit cairn and weather station at 00516 04060 (5hr 10min).

The quick way back to the car park in Coire na Ciste goes over Cnap Coire na Spreidhe, then follows the ridge line to the east of the Allt na Ciste where a constructed path leads back to the car park.

*Descending to  
The Saddle with  
Ben Macdui in the  
distance behind  
Loch Avon*

## ROUTE 10

Braeriach (1296m)

*Pronunciation:* Bray-ree-erch*Translation:* Dappled Neck

<b>Start</b>	Cross road to start of footpath
<b>Distance</b>	21km
<b>Ascent</b>	1200m
<b>Time</b>	6hr 10min
<b>Difficulty</b>	See the general introduction to the Cairngorms (above)
<b>Maps</b>	OS sheet 36; Explorer map 403; Harvey's Superwalker map Cairn Gorm; Area Map 6
<b>Parking</b>	Lower car park (about 2km below the Coire na Ciste car park)
<b>Hostel</b>	YHA Loch Morlich; Aviemore
<b>B&amp;B/hotel</b>	Coylumbridge; Aviemore
<b>Camping</b>	Coylumbridge
<b>Access</b>	Rothiemurchus, tel 01479 810477

Braeriach is a wonderful mountain, hard to reach from any direction, guarded by spectacular cliffs and dominating the western Cairngorm massif. It can be approached from Glen Feshie, perhaps by combining it with Sgor Gaoith, in a very long day, or from Glen Einich via Coire Dhondail. The shortest and most popular ascent (described here) is from the northeast, starting from the 'Sugar Bowl' car park at a sharp bend in the road just below the two ski-centre car parks.

Leave the car park by a path through trees to the south, then cross the road and follow the path on the other side down to a bridge over the Allt Creag an Leth-choin. Go over the bridge and continue on this heavily constructed path for 3km across moorland to the Chalamain Gap. Pass through the jumble of big boulders in the gap, then



continue on the path to the southwest, dropping down eventually into the Lairig Ghru. The ascent of Braeriach follows the long north ridge of Sron na Lairige, so cross the river and start the steep climb onto this ridge.

There is a substantial path at first, until boulders are reached higher up on the ridge. Clamber over the boulders to easier ground and pass by or over the two tops of Sron na Lairige. This is typical Cairngorm plateau:



• Volume 2 covers 143 Munro summits • Torridon, An Teallach and the northern Highlands • the Cairngorms, the northern glens and the Isle of Skye



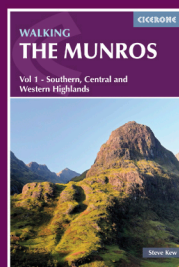
Whether you're planning to 'bag' them all, or just do a few, climbing Scotland's highest mountains – the Munros – will take you to places of extraordinary beauty; places that thrill and inspire awe and wonder in wild and remote mountain landscapes.

Volume 2 of this guide to all 282 Munros covers Torridon, the northern Highlands, the Cairngorms and the Isle of Skye, describing exciting and challenging routes over 143 unforgettable Munro summits.

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