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The **Knoydart 7** – a very linear round





Ladhar Bheinn SE ridge from eastern top



On top of Sgurr Mor

For those not familiar with Knoydart, it is an area often described as Scotland's "last wilderness". It is a fabulous, remote mountain area situated on a peninsula bordered by Loch Hourn in the North and Loch Nevis in the South, about 50 miles North of Fort William. It is not penetrated by any metalled road and access is therefore either on foot or by boat. The only habitation of any consequence is Inverie, which is situated at the south western corner of the peninsula and can only be reached by sea.

I had last been to Knoydart as a walker in '95 and managed to tackle Ladhar Bheinn and Luinne Bheinn over a weekend and had since been relishing the opportunity to climb the others. An opportunity came this year with a trip organised by members of my club (the Macclesfield Harriers) to Inverie. Last year it was reported that the six Knoydart Munros and Sgurr Mor (which collectively I'm labelling the "Knoydart 7") had been completed as a linear route from East to West, which got me thinking that perhaps I could do the same. However, due to logistics and timings, I needed to start and finish in Inverie in the same day, and that meant it would have to be a continuous "round".

So it was that at 3.45am on the 29th May 2009, I departed Inverie towards Gleann na Guiserein and my first objective, Ladhar Bheinn. The forecast for good weather appeared accurate, which came as a welcome relief following the clag and rain that we had been suffering for the last few days on Skye. The weather was mild too and I was comfortable just running in shorts and T-shirt. After completing circa 6km along the track I ascended to the col between the western top, An Diollaid (700m), and the summit to see the cloud departing from Ben Sgritheall on the northern side of Loch Hourn. I could also just make out the tops of the Black Cuillin poking through the clouds on Skye to the west. The clouds continued to roll back and the sun became brighter as I passed the half trig (lightening strike?) on the way to the summit to

reveal a fantastic early morning view down the impressive SE ridge towards my next objective of Luinne Bheinn.

Descending the SE ridge seemed to take an age because of the undulations and care required on certain steep and greasy scrambling sections. Eventually I reached Mam Barrisdale, waded through the bogs (the ground was absolutely saturated) to join the obvious path heading up the southern slopes of Luinne Bheinn. I kept following the path thinking that at any moment it would head north and up onto the ridge to the summit. It didn't. Instead it petered out due south of the summit and a couple of hundred metres below it just as the ground started descending east. I'm still not sure where I went wrong but decided to hack

up through the crags to gain the ridge and eventually emerged between the western top (938m) and the summit. After touching the cairn I carried on in the direction of the eastern top to try to find a way down. It didn't look direct enough to me and there seemed to be quite few greasy crags in the way so I headed back to the western top, descending the south east spur to the col.

I made my way up through more 30 degree bogs and small crags to the top at 804m where I spotted a lone walker behind me but on a clear path further to the north. I think this was the same walker who I saw disappearing over the eastern top of Luinne Bheinn as I was approaching summit. Too far away to chat though, and I wasn't going to wait. I continued following the undulating ridge towards Meall Buidhe, enjoying the scrambling sections as I ascended to the eastern top.

The summit of my next objective, Sgurr na Ciche, was in cloud; the skies had turned distinctly grey and rather threatening and the wind was getting up. Upon departing Meall Buidhe's summit I retraced my steps towards the eastern top but then contoured round the southern side to join the SE ridge. I had noticed on the way up that my original plan to descend more or less due east into Ile Coire from the eastern top could have been problematic because of the array of crags and slabs below. I continued down the SE ridge to a notch at about 820m and there headed NE down a wet, grassy slope into the coire by way of some down hill water skiing and bum sliding! I picked up the Allt na Sealga river following it out of the coire, criss-crossing it every now and again to maintain the best line. As the ground started to steepen I transferred to the northern side and out of the river gully for better views of the River Carnach, looking for a suitable crossing point. The bad news was that the river was looking swollen from



Ladhar Bheinn at Dawn



Ben Sgritheall in the distance

the recent rain, the good news that blue skies and sunshine were now dominating and I had stumbled across a herd of deer at close quarters (although not for long!). I aimed for a point about 200 metres upstream of the confluence with the Allt Achadh a' Ghlinne but the river here was too deep and fast flowing. I was becoming concerned that a large detour upstream or downstream to the bridge at Carnoch may be the only crossing possibility. I headed downstream towards the confluence with fingers metaphorically crossed. At the confluence itself the river split in two as it went either side of a small island. To my relief the wider western branch was shallow and passable with care and the eastern branch no problem at all. I was then across and passing remnants of the clearances on my way towards the 700m climb up the obvious gully onto the SW ridge of Sgurr na Ciche. The climb was a sustained slog through more wet ground but with the advantage that there was plenty of water to drink as it was starting to get quite warm. Once onto the ridge the climb to the summit was a delightful scramble on a reasonably clear path. Emerging onto the top I was rewarded with fantastic views of Ladhar Bheinn in the west, Ben Nevis in the east and the rest of my journey along the ridge to Sgurr Mor about seven kilometres away as the crow flies. A couple of more photos and then I picked up the path for the rocky descent to the col with Garbh Chioch Mhor and then followed

the fence posts onwards.

My first conversation of the day came as I reached the summit slopes of Sgurr nan Coireachan and bumped into a man and his dog. A brief chat and I continued on over the top and the descent towards An Eag. It was very warm on the ridge despite the strong, buffeting wind and I was parched by the time I reached Sgurr Beag. I hadn't stumbled across any convenient running water since the gully on Sgurr na Ciche so I filled up from a small pool near the summit and had another brief chat with a guy with a huge rucksack heading for the bothy at Sourlies.

At last I reached the foot of the 250m climb up Sgurr Mor. A stalker's track zig-zags its way up to the summit but I was keen to shelter from the wind and not to meander, so I cut straight up in the lee as best I could and rejoined the path higher up for the scramble through the crags to the summit. The sense of achievement that I felt at reaching the final summit was soon replaced with some weariness as realisation dawned that I was now at the point furthest away from Inverie! A bite to eat and I was off back down, retracing my steps to An Eag. From An Eag I descended south towards to join the Allt Coire nan Uth, then into Glen Dessary, to pick up the well defined path heading west to the pass before Sourlies. My progress was slow due to the oppressive heat (27C forecast for the glens), my tiredness and also because the path was in fact one huge bog that regularly swallowed my legs up to

my knees - it soon became a war of attrition! I avoided the temptation to paddle in Lochain a' Mhaim and was soon rewarded with superb views over upper Loch Nevis and the beach at Sourlies. It was fortunate that the tide was out and I could run round the headland on the beach towards Carnoch - I hadn't considered this potential obstacle when planning the route. It was then a question of crossing boggy estuarine vegetation to the rickety bridge at Carnoch. My advice is stick to the path beside the river when you reach the southernmost bend in the river otherwise the man-eating bogs might get you. I crossed the Carnach and made my way past the abandoned buildings at Carnoch and then onto the track leading up the 500m climb to Mam Meadail. This time I was grateful for the less exhausting route offered by the meanderings of this stalker's path.

From the pass it was then a sweltering run downhill on a good track past the Druim bothy to the Brocket monument. From the monument the path climbs gradually until just above Inverie where it joins a road for the final descent to Inverie House and the finish, which I had departed from 15h 34m earlier. This is an excellent route offering a wide variety of experiences from airy scrambling to beaches. I would recommend it to anyone with the necessary fitness and mountain craft who enjoys a long day out on the hill in remote and beautiful places.