

Meall Greigh, Meall Garbh and An Stuc

by Andy Crawford

Start point: OS 1:50,000 Landranger Sheet 51 or OS 1:25,000 Explorer Sheet 322 Grid Ref NN677398.

Parking: Lawers Village. There are very few parking opportunities however, the horn carver will allow parking beside his house and workshop for a 'small' fee – currently £5.00 (Sept 2003). There is also space for three or four cars, tightly parked, on the grass verge outside the east boundary of the Lawers Hotel some 400 metres (about quarter of a mile) to the west.

Grading: This is a strenuous walk recommended only for the very fit and competent hillwalker. There is a relatively short, but moderately exposed scramble on the ascent of An Stuc and because of this, it is not recommended that dogs be taken. Allow between 6 and 8 hours.

These three mountains form an outstandingly spectacular arc at the head of the Lawers Burn on the eastern side of the Lawers range. Meall Greigh, the first of the day, lies most easterly and is a grassy hill with no distinguishing features. Meall Garbh rises steeply above Lochan nan Cat to its double cairn and the third, An Stuc, is a markedly fine peak for it has a steep and rocky north ridge leading from the bealach between it and Meall Garbh. This is the only part of the traverse of the main Lawers ridge likely to generate any difficulty in summer or winter! It was the first time that I had got any dirt under my fingernails on any of my Munro outings.

This route starts from the A827 road at the bridge over the Lawers Burn where there is very limited space for parking cars. Starting from just 179 metres (587 feet) above sea level means that the steep grassy slopes of Meall Greigh, the first of the three Munros, will guarantee a lung bursting, thigh warming start to the day. On the map the route looks relatively straight forward, the dips between the summits appearing quite inconsequential. In reality, however, there's a lot of height to be lost ... and then gained.

Follow the road uphill to Machium farm. Keep to the left of the steading buildings on the narrow, marked path, and continue north-northwest alongside Lawers Burn until over the bridge and two stiles into the NTS reserve. A short distance from here, at Grid Ref NN675417 a feint and intermittent, narrow track bears north up onto the grassy slopes, over Sron Mhor from where the incline moderates. From the summit cairn on Meall Greigh (1,001 metres / 3,284 feet) bear west-northwest then west on a clear path to reach a broad grassy ridge, the Lairig Innein, at Grid Ref NN658441 then continue following the obvious path that lies on either side of the fence line up to the double cairn summit of Meall Garbh (1,118 metres / 3,667 feet). Although there is a good fence line to follow for most of the way, in poor weather conditions, it is worthwhile taking a compass bearing from one hill to the other.

An Stuc (also 1,118 metres / 3667 feet) is a steep sided, conical peak with three ridges, the north-east ridge is crags, accessed from Meall Garbh. The south ridge leads to Ben Lawers via Creag an Fhithich and is less demanding, and a longer north ridge leads down into Fin Glen and Glen Lyon. The usual means of ascent is the ridge from Ben Lawers.

From Meall Garbh, descend southwest to the narrow bealach at Grid Ref NN642433 then take the narrow zig-zag path upwards. This path ends at an exceptionally steep scramble where a moderate degree of exposure is encountered and great care must be taken to avoid a slip or fall. The ground is badly eroded, soft and almost permanently wet and the rock slippery. It takes around 20 minutes to complete this section to reach the summit cairn from where the most spectacular panorama will take care of any racing pulse!

Descend the gentle slope southwards to the Bealach Dubh then turn east down Ravens Gully on the grassy slope to reach the southwest corner of Lochan nan Cat. This area is mostly devoid of paths of any significance. Keeping to the south side of the Lochan, head east to the dam at Grid Ref NN662427. From here follow the rough road to where a narrow path leads off east down the embankment to the footbridge over the Lawers Burn at Grid Ref NN672420. Oddly enough, it is necessary to negotiate half of the burn to reach the bridge that takes walkers over the other half! However, if the water is low, there is no need to use the bridge at all. The footpath on the east side of the burn leads back to the starting point.