

Meall Tairneachan and Farragon Hill

WALK FACTS

Distance: 10½ miles / 17km

Map: OS Landranger 1:50,000 sheet 52 or Explorer 1:25,000 Sheet 386

Start/Parking: Roadside parking at Grid Ref. NN780561 on the west side of the B846 Aberfeldy to Tummel Bridge road just past Loch Kinardochoy at the junction with Schiehallion Road, opposite the entrance for the Foss Mine where there is room for several cars.

Grading: This is an exposed and quite strenuous walk over two Corbetts, through some fairly remote countryside and suitable for fit and well-equipped hill-walkers only.

Much of this route is on the rough access road to the Foss Mine and a short distance beyond, but some of the route is trackless and requires some accurate navigation, especially in adverse weather conditions.

There is no shelter from the elements once above the tree line therefore care must be taken to ensure that proper footwear and clothing is worn. A good route but in winter weather or low cloud, a map and compass, and the ability to navigate with them effectively may be required. Sheep graze the hillsides so dogs should be kept on a lead and under strict control at all times.

Rock blasting takes place at the mine from time to time and walkers should obey all signals or instructions given.

Meall Tairneachan and Farragon Hill are two Corbetts to the north of Aberfeldy. They are the highest tops in a line of knobbly schistose¹ hills that stretch from the Wade road at Loch Kinardochoy in the west to Pitlochry in the east. There are several fine lochans between the countless heathery bumps and crags.

Whilst these may not be the most exciting of hills, they do offer fine views from the wild north to the gentle south and are always dominated by the vast cone of Schiehallion to the west - especially from Tairneachan.

Meall Tairneachan 2582 feet/787m derives its name from the Gaelic for 'hill of thunder'. It is listed in the Geological Conservation Review (GCR) database - a review that encompasses the range of geological and geomorphologic features of Britain - and has a working open-cast barytes² mine east of the summit crags.

Farragon Hill 2559 feet/780m is a prominent landmark in Strathhtay with its bold, craggy summit is the shapelier one of the pair and commands an extensive view over wild, mountainous country. It lies between Loch Tummel and the River Tay to the west of Loch Derculich and was probably named after St Fheargain, a missionary from Iona. Like its neighbour the southern slopes are given to forestry plantations.

Start from the side of the B846 Aberfeldy to Tummel Bridge road and begin the serious, uphill 'trudge' - quite steeply at times - to a height of 2,400 feet / 731.5m before relenting near the summit of Meall Tairneachan after which the road dips to a roundabout!

Since it is a relatively short and easy ascent, the climb to the triangulation pillar on Meall Tairneachan is best left for the return journey, as the 'assault' on Farragon Hill calls for a considerable amount of energy resources. Continue up to the short flat summit of the climb then descend into the corrie where the barytes mine dominates the foreground and Farragon Hill the distant skyline.

The mine, perhaps one of the world's richest deposits of barytes, has been worked since the late 70's and few are aware of its existence. It is a strange, unearthly and depressing place to come across, especially in dreich weather and not a particularly pleasant sight in this beautifully remote area, nor is it any pleasure to pass through. The descent to the mine is equally as steep and rough as the previous part of the route and care should be taken to avoid a slip or fall on the loose surface.

Follow the road as it bends round the upper area of the mine past a multitude of wet sink holes where the water draining off is mixed with lime to neutralise the quarried stone in order to ensure its purity as it eventually flows into Loch Tummel far below.

The next part of the route continues on the wide road but now it is more overgrown with sort grass and makes for more pleasurable walking. Where the road ends, descend the grassy bank on the right and head on a direct course for sharp cone that is the summit of Farragon Hill. There are no paths through the heather and boggy grass, so be prepared to expend some energy! Once through this, the climb begins in earnest though all the crags are small and it is very easy to find a way up.

From the summit of Farragon Hill the path ascending distant Beinn a'Ghlo to the east is obvious and the view is unusual in that Braigh Coire Chruin Bhalagain, one of the three Munros that make up this massif, is the dominant peak. The overall panorama is well worth the effort involved in getting there. Below, to the east, long, winding roads lead around and over the knobbly ridge from the upper reaches of Strath Tay in the south, northwards to eastern end of Loch Tummel and the many lochans dotted around glisten in the sunshine - especially on a good day! On not so good days, take extra care on the summit to avoid a slip or fall on the steep sides. North and south the distant hills are too numerous to identify but to the west, the summit of Schiehallion can just be seen beyond Meall Tairneachan.

Return by the same route, remembering to keep to the upper side of the mine away from the workings. The track up from the mine is steep and tiring after having climbed Farragon Hill and beaten a way back through the heather and boggy grass of the corrie. At the top of the climb at Grid Ref NN807547 there is a small iron post on the bank. A narrow path heads south from here up an easy slope to the cairned triangulation pillar on the summit. Do not be tempted to follow the easy path to the southwest from this mark as it bears away from the highest of the three tops!

Return to this point, turn left, and follow the mine access road back to the starting place in the knowledge that the rest of the route is all downhill - with the exception of one or two small undulations that perhaps went unnoticed on the way up!

¹ Schistose rocks are metamorphic and can be formed from basalt, an igneous rock; shale, a sedimentary rock; or slate, a metamorphic rock. Through tremendous heat and pressure, these rocks were transformed into Schist.

² Barytes (also known as Barite and Barites) is a form of Barium Sulphate. The mineral is heavy and is used as 'mud' in oil wells to counter the pressures of the up-welling oil and also in the foundations of nuclear plants and hospital radiography units.