

Schiehallion

By Andy Crawford

Distance: 6½ miles/10.5km.

Map: OS 1:50,000 Landranger Sheet 51 or 52 or 1:25,000 Explorer Sheet 386

Start/Finish: Braes o' Foss car park, off the minor road between Kinloch Rannoch and the B846 Tummel Bridge to Aberfeldy road at Grid Ref NN753557. The public toilets here are closed in winter.

Grading: A straight-forward mountain ascent suitable for fit adults and older children, many youngsters start their Munro 'bagging' on Schiehallion at a very early age.

There is no shelter from the elements on this route therefore care must be taken to ensure that proper footwear and clothing is worn. This is a good summer or winter route but in adverse weather or low cloud, a map and compass, and the ability to navigate with them effectively will be required as there is a dangerously steep southern side to the summit ridge above the wonderfully wild Gleann Mor. Choose a good, clear day to get the most out of Schiehallion.

Schiehallion is one of Scotland's best known landmarks and possibly the most popular of Scotland's 284 Munros - mountains over 3,000 feet/914m - on which innumerable walkers have begun their Munro 'bagging'. The name 'Schiehallion' is translated as '*The Fairy Hill of the Caledonians*', which seems a lot of meaning for one word, but it's one of those mountain names worth knowing!

Much of the mountain is now owned by the John Muir Trust, a conservation body, who purchased the eastern part in 1999.

In 1774, Neville Maskelyne, the Astronomer Royal, selected Schiehallion because of its isolated position and convenient shape for an experiment to measure the density of the planet and thus measure the universal force of gravity promulgated by Newton which underpins the science of astronomy.

He spent time on the mountain, setting up observatories and scientific instruments to measure the degree that the mountain attracted a pendulum by comparing its angle to the stars. Amongst his assistants was one William Mason who 'invented' the contour line to assist his aspect of the work which fixed the position of Maskelyne's pendulum by triangulation.

Schiehallion is busy at any time of the year and it is unlikely that it will ever diminish in popularity.

The New Millennium path, funded through public appeal, begins at the south end of the car park and ascends at an easy angle, winding its way across the moorland and up the hillside to 2,880 feet/874m from where it becomes rougher and less distinct. The route rises along the rocky backbone of the mountain and, after a slightly steeper climb, the angle of ascent eases off again and the summit, a mass of large, angular, quartzite boulders comes into view.

Negotiating the boulders over the rough terrain is something of a challenge and extreme care should be taken to avoid injury.

The summit is mostly great slabs of rock and is marked by a cairn. There was once a triangulation pillar on the summit but it has now gone.

Take time to savour the views westwards over Loch Rannoch towards Glencoe; east over Loch Tummel to the Grampian mountains and to the south-west the Carn Maig horseshoe between Glen Mor and Glen Lyon before returning by the ascent route.