

Sgiath Chuil and Meall Glas

by Andy Crawford

WALK FACTS

Distance: 11 miles/18 km

Maps: OS Landranger Sheet 51 or Explorer Sheet 378

Start/parking The end of the public road through Glen Lochay from Killin Grid Ref 467364, a short way beyond Kenknock Farm where there is parking for around a dozen vehicles in the area opposite the single track access road to the hydro-electric dam.

Time: Allow 6 - 8 hours

Grading: A strenuous walk on unrelenting grass slopes with steep ascents and descents to contend with! Recommended for fit hillwalkers. Sheep and cattle grazing so dogs must be kept on a lead.

The narrow Glen Lochay valley in Breadalbane stretches for some 20 miles/32 km along the greater part of the course of the River Lochay that rises to the north of Crianlarich and flows eastwards to Loch Tay. There is a power station in the glen and some fine examples of ancient, mysterious, cup and ring marked stones around, and the ruins of the prehistoric village of Tirai just to the north of Duncroisk. They provide evidence of a very early settlement.

The National Trust for Scotland has sensitively restored the Moirlanich Longhouse in Glen Lochay and this is open to visitors.

Towards the head of the glen there are no less than six Munros on offer, in addition to some fine lower level routes.

This route begins from the end of the public road through Glen Lochay, a short way beyond Kenknock Farm, by the bridge over the Innisraineach Burn. Head west across the bridge and over the stile beside a locked gate on the far side of which the wide track leads out through open land and crosses a large pipeline a short way on. This is part of the extensive local hydro-electric network, much of which is buried under the ground and goes largely unseen.

The track follows the River Lochay upstream for about a mile to where it forks. Take the left-hand track that drops down to the wide but, at times, shallow ford. There is no longer a bridge here so care must be taken on the crossing. Once clear of the river, pass through a gate in a fence, across a field then through a second gate and head southeast, climbing gently to the right of the derelict farm cottage at Lubchurrin onto a wide track leading to the open hillside.

On the OS Landranger Sheet 51 this track is shown as ending at Grid Ref NN453342 near a dam and sluice on the Lubchurrin Burn. On the Explorer Sheet 378 it is not shown at all above the cottage, however, on the ground, it continues south and west as it rises steeply up and around the lower, northern slope of Beinn Cheathaich.

Continue up to about the 500 metre contour then work eastwards across the slightly boggy terrain before climbing the grassy slope towards the ridge ahead. From here there is, at times, an intermittent path leading to the summit of Meall a' Churain. The route south from this top to Sgiath Chuil is relatively straightforward but can be very confusing in mist or with a full covering of snow, as an intermediate (second) knoll is not clearly defined on the map. In good weather conditions the view down the steep slope into and over Glen Dochart are quite awe inspiring.

The next stage involves heading back towards Meall a' Churain to between the two knolls and then easily, but with care, westwards down the steep grassy slope into the Lairig a' Churain from where a step climb has to be made north westwards up onto the north ridge of Beinn Cheathaich. After eventually gaining the ridge turn south and make for the trig-point on the summit.

There is a good path along the broad, curved ridge around the rim of Coire Cheathaich, leading past Meall Glas Bheag before turning northwest up to the summit cairn on Meall Glas. The walking on this path gets all the leg muscles working easily again and offers some relief after the seemingly relentless climbing.

Return towards Beinn Cheathaich and continue northwards down the steep grassy hillside to reach the wide track mentioned above then turn right (east) and follow it all the way back to Lubchurrin and the river crossing for the walk back to the start.