

19 LOCH CLUANIE to STRATHGLASS

The contemporary accounts do not describe the places and routes with sufficient precision to be certain about the details of Charles' movements on this leg. However, from a study of the map, and the fact that Coire Dho features prominently in the story, it is possible to piece together a very plausible route.

Coire Dho is some 23 miles long, and, not counting any time that might be spent at the cave in Coire Mheadhoin, the time required is ten hours. At the end of the leg, there are hotels and guest-houses in Tomich and Cannich. Some walkers may wish to make arrangements for a car to meet them at the east end of Loch Affric.

The Hiding Place at Cluanie

Landranger Map: 33

OS Maps Central Grid Reference:

NH 110 140

It is very likely that Charles' resting place during the day after the walk up Glen Shiel is somewhere in Coire Lair, the corrie on the south side of Sgurr nan Conbhairian. The upper slope of Coire Lair (NH 124 127) has a boulder field with many large rocks capable of hiding five men easily.

Loch Cluanie to Coire Mheadhoin

Landranger Map: 34

OS Maps Central Grid Reference:

NH 110 140

It is practically certain that Charles and his party climbed Sgurr nan Conbhairian. Its summit is probably the place where Charles met Donald MacDonald, after Donald had found the Glen Moriston men. The climb

starts from the main road, close to the boundary between the Inverness district and the Skye and Lochalsh district. The route follows the south-west ridge of Carn Ghluasaid up a very clear stalker's path, skirting the base of the boulder field in Coire nan Clach. It eventually leads to the summit plateau, where Charles probably spent the wet miserable night standing in a cave. Here, there are two cairns some fifty yards apart. The smaller one is on the summit. The larger one marks the edge of cliffs to the north.

The next stage is to follow the very broad north-west ridge. In mist, it is helpful to follow the line of the cliffs on the right. Once over Creag a' Chaorainn and Glas Bealach, there is a tiring final pull up to the summit of Sgurr nan Conbhairian.

The route continues along the north ridge, as it descends gently from the summit. After a mile, it climbs to Sail Chaorain. This summit overlooks Coire Mheadhoin on the right. In summer, the descent of a thousand feet into Coire Mheadhoin is on very steep scree and grass. In winter, the difficulty of the descent will depend entirely on the snow conditions.

Distance: 5 miles (8 km)

Height of ascent : 3470 feet (1050 m)

Naismith time: 3 hours 57 mins

The Caves

Landranger Map: 34

OS Maps Central Grid Reference:

NH 110 140

There are no caves known in Coire Dho itself. Moreover, it would be very surprising if any should be discovered in the future.

The landscape is too gentle and green, and there are no rocks or boulders.

At its western end, Coire Dho divides into Coire Mheadhoin and Coire Sgreumh - also known as Coire Sgraing. According to Glenaladale, Coire Mheadhoin was the site of the second cave that Charles used. In contrast, Patrick Grant, who, as a local man would know the area much better than Glenaladale, maintains that this second cave was in 'Coirskreaoch', a phonetic spelling of the local pronunciation of 'Coire Sgreumh'.

The only cave that is currently known to exist in this whole area is in Coire Mheadhoin. If Charles stayed in two caves during his stay in this area, the site of one of them has been lost. On the other hand, all the local stalkers and landowners deny that there are two caves in the whole Ceannacroc area. They are certain that, if there were a second cave, they would know about it. A possible explanation for the apparent disappearance of the cave in Coire Sgreumh is that, many years ago, it was deliberately walled up to prevent sheep falling into it. In support of this suggestion, Coire Sgreumh certainly has one likely-looking boulder with rocks that were obviously piled artificially under an overhang.

Thus, there is confusion about how many caves there actually were, where they were, and when they were used. All that can be said with certainty is that there is one cave in Coire Mheadhoin that fits the description given in all the contemporary accounts. In addition, tradition says it was used at some time during Charles' stay in this area.

The cave is near the stream on the southern side of the corrie, directly below a pyramidal rock formation in the cliffs forming the corrie's western wall. It is under a pile of enormous boulders that dwarf all the other rocks nearby. At the cave's entrance, there is a large metal commemorative plaque fixed to the rock. Near the entrance, there is a space that must have been used as 'a bed for his royal highness in a closet shaped out by nature, and seemingly designed by her for the reception of his royal highness'. Inside, it is

possible to stand and move around easily.

Coire Mheadhoin to Cannich

It is not known exactly how Charles walked to Strathglass from Coire Mheadhoin. There are two possibilities. One is a high level route via Carn a Coire Mheadhoin on the ridge above Coire Mheadhoin. The other, down Allt Riabhach, is at a lower level, and is more suitable in bad weather.

Via Carn na Coire Mheadhoin

Landranger Maps: 34, 25

OS Maps Central Grid References:

NH 180 190, NH 220 230, NH 280 290

In order to follow this route, there is no alternative to clambering back up the steep slopes from the cave to Carn na Coire Mheadhoin. This task requires more determination than strength. Then, the way ahead is to follow the ridge northwards, past the summits of Tigh Mor na Seilge and Carn a Choire Ghuirm to Cadha Riabhach, which is the bealach between Carn a Choire Ghuirm and Carn a Choire Gairbh.

The route turns east into Coire Gairbh. This end of Coire Gairbh is rarely visited, and initially there is no path over the boggy ground. However, when the glen eventually turns northwards, a mile or so after Loch an Sguid, there is a substantial cart track. This track soon veers up right to meet the old road from Glen Affric to Cannich.

The route follows this road eastwards along a wide ridge. When this road descends to Allt an Laghair, and turns south by the new man-made lochan, it is essential to continue along the crest of the ridge by following the edge of the plantation boundary. In order to cross Allt an Laghair, which is quite wide and fast flowing, it will probably be necessary to descend to the lochan first, and then climb back to the plantation fence along the other bank.

The route continues over undulating

moorland, and passes by the northern shore of the lonely Loch nan Sean-each. The approach to Loch an Eag is through woods, and along a cart track, that skirts the southern shore of the loch to join a forest track, leading down Coille an Leth-uillt. At Knockfin bridge, it is possible to cross over to the main road through Tomich to Cannich.

Distance: 18 miles (29 km)

Height of ascent: 1440 feet (440 m)

Naismith time: 6 hours 32 mins

Via Allt Riabhach

Landranger Maps: 34, 25

OS Maps Central Grid References:

NH 180 190, NH 230 200

The first stage is to descend through the peat

hags of Coire Mheadhoin to Coire Dho. Instead of crossing the bridge over to the south side of the Dho, the route continues along the north bank, and climbs round to the eastern side of Creag ban Gobhar. A very distinct path follows Allt Riabhach all the way down into Guisachan Forest, and on to Cougie. Thereafter, the track becomes a road suitable for cars. It continues through Tomich to Cannich.

Distance: 18 miles (29 km)

Height of ascent: 500 feet (150 m)

Naismith time: 6 hours 3 mins

Gaelic Place Name Details

<i>Name</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Allt an Laghair	alt an la-air	forked stream
Allt Riabhach	alt ree-a-vakh	brindled stream
Carn a' Choire Gairbh	karn a khora garev	cairn of the rough corrie
Carn a' Choire Ghuirm	karn a khora ger-em	cairn of the blue corrie
Carn Ghlusaid	karn ghloositch	cairn of the clearance
Coille an Leth-Uillt	kolya an leh ultch	wood of the small streams
Coire nan Clach	kora nan klakh	corrie of the stones
Coire Dho	kora gho	singed or scorched corrie
Coire Làir	kora lehr	corrie of the mare
Coire Mheadhoin	kora vee-an	middle corrie
Coire Sgreumh	kora sgrokh	corrie of loathing
Creag a' Chaorainn	krehk a kheran	rock of the rowan
Creag Ban Gobhar	krehk baan go-ar	rock of the white goat
Glas Bealach	glas byalakh	grey pass
Loch an Eag	lokh an ek	lake of the gap
Loch an Sguid	lokh an skooch	lake of the dirty water
Sgurr nan Conbhairean	sgurr na konvair-ian	peak of the dog handlers
Tigh Mòr na Seilge	ty mor na shelg-eh	hunting lodge