

GEORGE RENDALL'S REPORT ON HIS CAIRNGORM CHALLENGE FOR 500 MILES IN JUNE 2012

Six of us set off from the Cairngorm car park on June 1st for a challenge to climb both sides of the Lairig Rhu in 24 hours taking in 16 Munro tops including five of the six highest mountains in the UK. Reaching our first top, Stobh Coire, at 12-00 we set out for Cairngorm in warm sunshine, factor 50 sunscreen and good spirits. By 2-00 we'd topped Cairngorm, Cairn Lochan and Lurcher's Crag and enjoyed a lunch in sunshine on Lurcher's Meadow. We walked to Cairn Etchican encountering our first decent snowfields (two weeks before there was so much snow, the walk would have been foolhardy for a novice like me) and then on to Ben MacDhui (second highest peak in the UK) topping it around 5-30. I'd been naive enough to imagine that the Munros were what counted and the tops would be the easy bits along the way; our next climb was Sron Riach a boulder top a kilometre from Ben MacDhui. Scrambling up and over the boulder field to the top was hard work but the descent was down the side of Ben MacDhui and a really grueling 30-40 minutes in which every step needed focus and it knocked some of the wind out of our sails before the last climb of the day. Carn a Mhain is a ridge climb with three or four false tops and a few short exposed ridges to test my vertigo. We saw a golden eagle catching the updraft on top but maybe too late in the day for us to stop and enjoy. Another long descent to the Luibeg burn where some friends had set camp and we got some much needed fuel on board. I also steeped my legs and feet in the burn for 5 minutes which was icily painful but a great help next morning.

Up at 4am on Sat 2nd June we set off for a 4km walk to the base of the aptly named Devil's Peak. Climbing the steep river course, we were on the plateau before 6.30 and spirits lifted as we could see much of what lay before us and had climbed a lot of the days height. We topped the Devil's Peak then on to Cairn Toull via a rocky top and a long stretch of boulder field in snowy cloud. Poor visibility was threatening, little injuries were creeping in and one or two of the climbers began to show signs of fatigue. Cairn Toull is a desolate, rough and rocky place and all were glad to get off it and see the cloud clear before we climbed Angels Peak. At this point we reached the plateau on the way to Braeriach, the third highest mountain in Britain. This area was truly flat, sparse and lunar, the nearest thing to a desert, or tundra, I've seen in Scotland. Over Braeriach and down the long descent back to the Lairig Rhu we reached our sixteenth and last top at 12.25 - politely late.

I am a complete novice and these were my first Munros (though they won't be my last). The challenge was hard, but it was supposed to be, and I thoroughly enjoyed pounding the Pentlands in preparation. We were very lucky with the weather and the company was terrific. We raised some money for causes close to our hearts and had a few beers afterwards. There were a few injury niggles but what do we expect when 'over the hillers do sport'. No negatives, a very enjoyable trip.