

## BONNIE PRINCE CHARLIE'S LONG MARCH

*A retracing of the route followed by Prince Charles Edward Stuart through the mountains of Moidart, when fleeing from the Redcoat army, 1746  
Reprinted from an article published in the Scottish Mountaineering Club Journal 1990*

*(c) Peter D. Brown, 1990*

### Background to the March

The Scottish Mountaineering Club guide to the Western Highlands contains a fascinating account of the Wanderings of Bonnie Prince Charlie, following his defeat at Culloden in 1746. Particularly impressive is the passage which describes the Prince's flight through the Redcoat cordon that had been established from the head of Loch Eil to Loch Hourn. Charles's route runs from Loch nan Uamha, near Arisaig, to Glen Shiel, through what is now one of the wildest and roughest parts of Scotland, and crosses at least seven major ridge and valley systems lying between the two "Roads to the Isles". The journey was over 50 miles long, and involved some 20,000 feet of ascent: the prince's party accomplished it in just over five days, travelling for the most part at night.

Since the description of the route has appeared in the SMC guide for at least 50 years now, I had always presumed that it must have become a popular "long distance trail", a sort of West Highland Way of the far west, and followed by hundreds of hardy mountaineers each year. I was therefore surprised to find very little evidence of walkers. It seemed therefore that it would be worthwhile writing up the notes of the trip that I finally made in the summer of 1989, beginning on the exact same day, 17th July, as Prince Charles's flight from Glenborrodale, 243 years ago. <sup>1</sup>



## **The Start: The Cave at Glen Borrodale beach**

It is not practicable to follow the Prince's route with absolute precision. The records are inexact in places, and open to interpretation in others. I also made a number of minor deviations of my own, mainly to find somewhere comfortable to camp (as opposed to resting in the open like the Prince). The main deviations are listed at the end of the article, following references to some of the various and varying accounts of Prince Charles's journey, to which I have alluded.

The area covered by the march is vast, and in the eighteenth century much of it was inhabited. Now all this country is bare of people and, apart from a number of herds of deer, largely bare of animals. There are few tracks: over half the route wanders over rough moorland or the slopes of high corries. There may have been more tracks in Prince Charles's time: but he would not have had the benefit of the well-built stalkers' paths which, with a few short sections of road, now comprise some 30% of the route. Fortunately, however, he did have the help of men with local knowledge to guide him and his small party.

The prince was also forced to travel for all but the first two days by night and, one imagines, with little more than fitful sleep in between. There is no record of the weather faced by his party on this particular section of his wanderings; but it would be surprising if they were not forced to sleep out in the rain on occasions, and to navigate through mist and cloud in the dark.

By contrast, I had the luxury of a tent and sleeping bag and, was blessed by the unusual heat wave of 1988: shorts and tee-shirt throughout. The only problem I had to face was the midges, which gradually increased in number with the rising humidity to a crescendo on the third night out, driving me to complete the march on the fourth day, rather than extending it to the planned five-day affair.

## **Away from Glenborrodale**

From the very first stepping out of the car at Beasdale, a sense of awesome loneliness quickly develops. The march does indeed begin with a footpath up Glen Beasdale, with the boot-marks of other walkers clearly stamped upon its boggier sections. But within an hour you would be forgiven for beginning to think that these footprints are imaginary. A gentle rain mists in from behind, and you are enveloped in a world entirely of your own.

The path, such as it is, stops at the Bealach a' Mhàma. Time for a bite: but the first midges of the march soon awake you out of your reverie and zap you back into action. 700 feet below is Loch Mhàma. Rough ground, no longer any path. Two miles from the road and railway, the march has really begun.



*Loch Mâma*

Slither down the wet heather and boulders to the loch. Gradually a sheep or deer path establishes a meandering presence. Suddenly, a tent! Maybe there are others doing the route. It is after all the anniversary. Maybe MacEachine's Refuge will be swarming with backpackers, like the West Highland Way?

No. The little green tent stands empty of people, like the landscape around it. Suddenly, the sight of a half dozen cows at the end of Loch na Creige Dhuibhe surprises: as I must have astonished them. They were the last domestic animals to be seen for four days.

Up the burn on the right, over the top, and there stands Loch Beoraid. This must be one of the loveliest and least visited in the country: but it still lies less than two miles from the main Mallaig road and railway. Moreover, there is a boat moving on it; and a group of three walkers returning to the road over the path which goes down to Meoble: visions of a great party at MacEachine's Refuge once more?

No need to worry, the bealach is empty. Apart from John coming up to camp the first night with his four children, these are the only people I am to see before Glen Dessary, two days later.

The cave, marked "Prince Charlie's" on the maps, must I think be the one prepared by Angus MacEachine in readiness for the Prince to hide in; it lies in a wood topped by crazy tottering rock pillars, making the whole area a place of refuge. An entire guerrilla army could hide there, lurking under dozens of boulders and deep cracks in the ground. It's a fine place for disposing of careless children: the most obvious, dry, flat camp sites that present themselves turn out to overhang a 100-foot drop. So we camped in the bog at the top of the bealach, and the children complained bitterly of midges and made smutty jokes about bitten bums.



*Above MacEachain's Refuge - Loch Beoraid with Sgurr nan Coireachan in left distance*

Prince Charles was more sensible. He abjured the cave, went down to a house at Meoble, 800 feet below, and climbed back next day. He was also fit. He was also very much on the run by now, having just heard that a party of English ships was already in Loch Nevis, a few miles to the north.



*Looking down on Meoble*



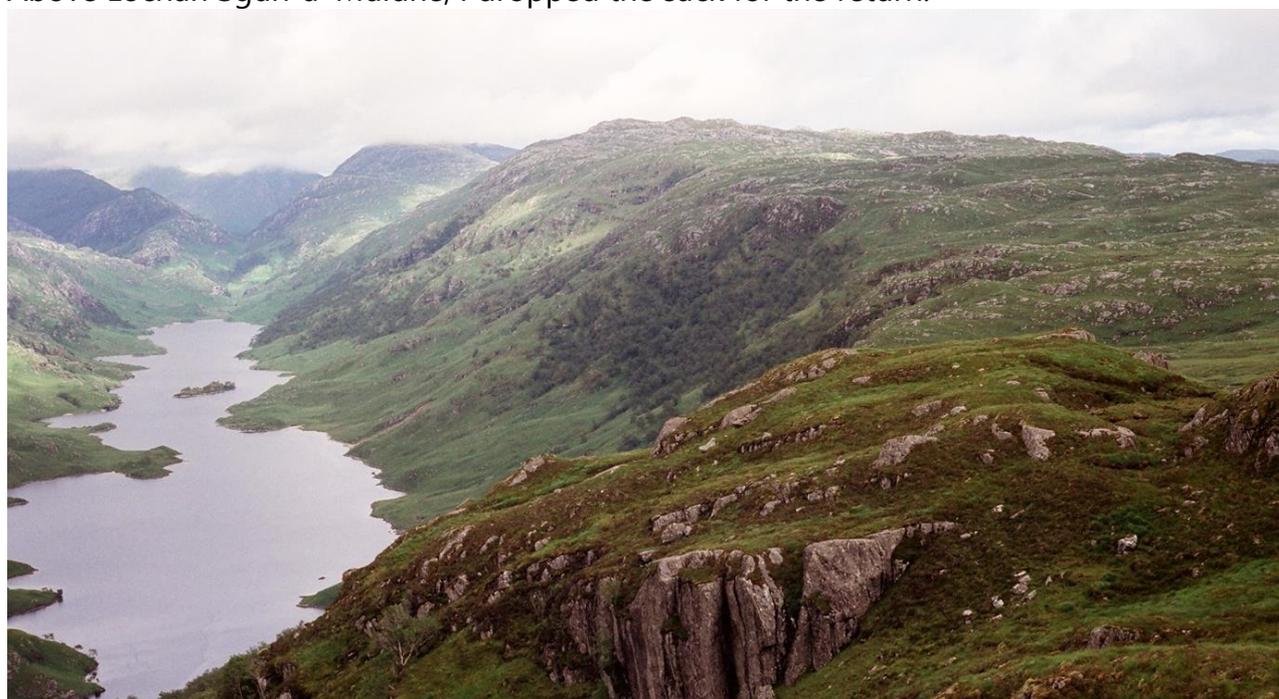
*The false MacEachain's Refuge*

All the same, the bealach is a magic spot: a spectacular, high camp site, with long views down Loch Beoraid, down over the farm at Meoble to Loch Morar and, turning round to the south, to the Moidart hills where the sun was setting late and orange. We knocked back a few whiskies. It was good at last to be on the way.

## Prince Charlie's Long Day on the Long Hill

The next day's route wanders eastwards over the gradually rising, knobby but marshy Glas-charn. Three miles on the map slowly meander into four, or even five. Two-and-a half hours to the summit, keeping carefully along the line of the iron fence that stands there now (a navigational aid denied Prince Charles). The sun is hot, the load heavy, but not too debilitating as the slope is very gentle. Emerging views of Sgurr na Ciche, across Loch Beoraid and Loch Morar, keep up the spirits. A couple of hidden lochans provide tempting camp sites.

Glas-charn of the modern O.S. is shown on the original 1897 O.S. as Sgurr a' Muidhe, which Prince Charles climbed. The modern O.S. marks Sgurr a' Muidhe as a separate peak some distance to the southeast of Glas-charn. I went to investigate the modern version of Sgurr a' Muidhe. Too far to the right to begin with. The better way is to continue to the summit marked 592m on the modern O.S.: then head straight down the knobby ridge, more or less due south, to a subsidiary bealach. At that point the fall-line moves rapidly westward. Above Lochan Sgurr a' Muidhe, I dropped the sack for the return.



*Loch Beoraid, Glas-charn and Sgurr a' Muidhe to right and Fraoch-Bheinn in the distance*

From the flank of Sgurr a' Muidhe (modern version) the whole of Loch Eilt is visible, as well as much of Loch Eil to the east, and it is therefore highly likely that the party went there to spy out troop movements. At this stage the party comprised Prince Charles; Captain Alexander MacDonald of Glenaladale; his brother, John MacDonald; a second John MacDonald, Borrodale's son; and one or two retainers who were now and again despatched on errands or "expresses". On Sgurr a' Muidhe John MacDonald, "young Glenaladale", was despatched to Glenfinnan for news.

The Prince immediately moved on, fast: down to the bealach above Féith a' Chatha, and up to Fraoch-bheinn in two hours. I took four; though this did include a splendid dip in Lochan Sgurr a' Muidhe and an hour's lunch break waiting vainly for John and his family to come up and meet me from Glenfinnan.



*Looking back west along Loch Eilt from Sgurr a' Mhuidhe – doubtless soldiers would have been on the lookout along the valley*

Apart from company, the important reason for this rendezvous was for John to relieve me of some surplus weight. My 55-litre climbing sack had served me well for many years, being just big enough to carry everything I ever needed. If it won't all go into the sack, I reasoned, then it's too much. Correctly, it had turned out. But I had compromised by acquiring two side pockets "for convenience". To keep cameras accessible, lunch and a little bit of something, I thought. Mistake. Overload. Pockets off, with their contents, and the sack was once more tolerable; back below the pain threshold. I left the sack at the bealach to "do" An Sutha and Fraoch-bheinn: John arrived at the col while I was away and removed the excess pockets. "Children refused to come" said the message, darkly.

Charles and the other two arrived at the top of Fraoch-bheinn at 2 pm, and met a party of clansmen herding cattle. They gave him milk to drink. Donald Cameron of Glen Pean was sent for, to guide the party out of Moidart; but before he could arrive, news came that soldiers were searching the hill they were on, and they left at sunset.



*Upper Glenfinnan, the pass between Streap and Sgurr Thuilm above Corryhully, from Fraoch-bheinn.*

*Troops would have been constantly passing between Glenfinnan and Loch Arkaig*

Precisely where the Prince's party descended we do not know: they may have gone straight down over very rocky terrain towards Gleann Donn and Reidh Gorm, thence cutting through directly into the upper region of Coire Odhar.



*The descent to Gleann Donn from Fraoch-bheinn is steep and rough. But the party must have found a way down through this stuff somewhere*

Having reached Coire Odhar at 11pm they were lucky enough to meet Donald Cameron who, despite being described as "an old gentleman", must have been as hardy as they, having just scaled the 2500-foot Sgurr Thuilm/ Coireachan ridge to reach the Prince. Having already travelled some 17 arduous miles, including 6000 feet of ascent, the party then "walked all night with him [Donald Cameron]", climbing another 3000 feet before daybreak.

I did not. My route lay back to the bealach, and down what turned out to be a reasonable path by the Allt Glac a' Bhodaich, veering westwards as it descended, to a sunny riverside camp at Kinlochbeairaid. Another magical spot. Two days out, the fires now well stoked, feet in good fettle. Good to be alive. An early alarm for the morning, which promised to be hot again.

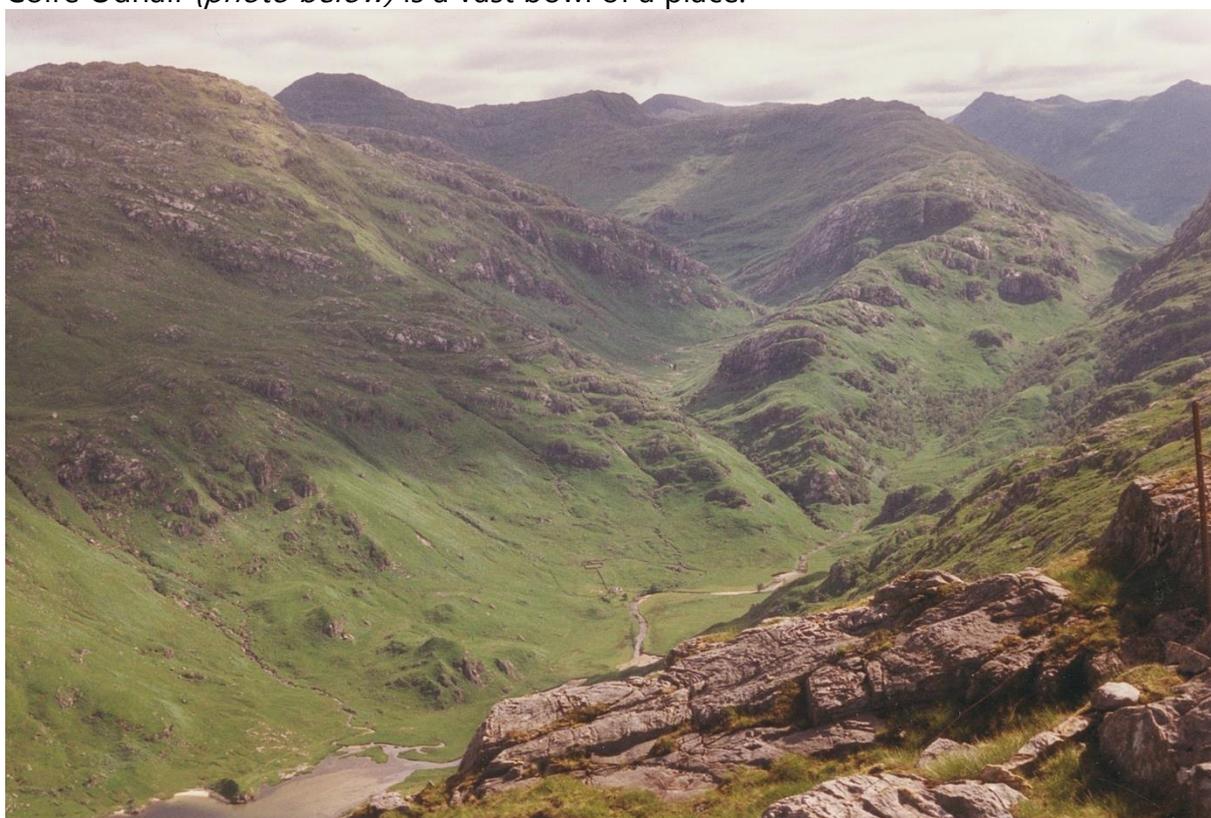
And so it was, but sticky too, unlike yesterday. Off at 6.45, followed by a quick return to retrieve forgotten sunhat. Lucky I noticed, as this faithful garment was to serve as sun, rain and midge protector, flyswat and oven-cloth: essential equipment.



*Kinlochbeairaid looking ENE. The Prince, having descended Fraochbheinn from the right, probably skirted the ridge above to traverse into Coire Odhar*

Fortunately the path into Coire Odhar is well-built and well-graded. It felt good at last to be moving with some speed. For the first time I began to feel confident that I could make it through to the end. I wondered whether the prince's confidence, which is legendary, was equally strong at this stage. The party had been on the go since early morning and, in the near darkness at eleven o'clock, before their fortunate rendezvous with their new guide, Donald Cameron, Coire Odhair must have been a presented a depressing aspect.

Coire Odhair (*photo below*) is a vast bowl of a place.



Grey and grim even in the sunlight, the emptiness is extreme. A couple of heaps of stones near the foot of the moraine under Sgurr nan Coireachan (out of sight up to the right) are the only indication that it may have been otherwise in Prince Charles's time. But it is doubtful if even then the corrie was much inhabited.

From the floor of the corrie, climb straight to Sgurr nan Coireachan (there can be little doubt that the Prince's route also lay over the summit, though there is no explicit record of it). By keeping right in under the summit I found it just possible to keep out of the ever-rising sun - not normally a problem in this part of the world.

Suddenly over the col to the west appeared the entire Cuillin range, dominating the new view: a dramatic demonstration of how Skye and its overlords, the MacDonalds and MacLeods, were for so many years central to the life of the Western Highlands. Their failure to support the prince was certainly a great blow to his campaign, and his sojourn on Skye was the briefest of any of his many stops during his five-month wanderings.

### **Land of the Living, Land of the Dead: Glen Pean and Glen Dessary**

The next section of the route crosses two lonely glens that in those days were thickly populated. Some 800 people are reported to have emigrated from Glen Pean during the Clearances; while it is reported that Glen Dessary alone produced 200 fighting men when Prince Charles raised his standard at Glenfinnan.<sup>2</sup> The two glens both start at the head of Loch Arkaig, near Strathan, one of the two buildings in the locality which are still inhabited. Redcoat soldiers were active at the head of Loch Arkaig, and indeed were plainly visible to the Prince's party. They therefore needed to cross both glens, unobserved by the soldiers, to reach Loch Quoich, the next valley to the north.

From Sgurr nan Coireachan the logical route for Prince Charles might thus appear to have been straight down to Glen Pean, to cross the river at a point near or above the present bothy, thence into Glen Dessary as high up as possible and so over the Bealach Coire-nan-Gall to Loch Quoich.

According to the accounts, however, it seems fairly certain that Charles's route from Coire Odhar lay due east, along the "South Glen Pean ridge" to Sgurr Thuilm, and then halfway down the latter's northeast ridge to rest for the day in a hollow which in those days appears to have borne the name "Mamnym Callum": Blaikie has Prince Charles reaching "a hollow running longitudinally through it capable of screening a party who might desire to proceed without being observed." The north-facing hanging corrie could certainly have sheltered the party from the view of soldiers at Strathan, at least until they emerged near the floor of the glen below the 1000-foot contour. And the hill had been searched the previous day, so the party thought themselves safe. Nevertheless the hiding place seems to have approached the enemy's camps perilously closely.

The modern 25,000 scale map introduces yet more confusion and amusement to the exploration. The Carn Mór-Monadh Gorm ridge, opposite, which separates Glen Pean from Glen Dessary, also bears a bealach named "Màm nam Callum", just west of the Monadh Gorm summit. This is no less close to Loch Arkaig, and even more visible, than the hollow on the ridge of Sgurr Thuilm. It is doubtful that Charles's party, who would have already travelled 22 miles and climbed 9,000 feet to reach Sgurr Thuilm, would have had time or energy to cross yet another valley and to make yet another ascent before dawn. So it seems that they spent their first day of real rest halfway down Sgurr Thuilm (spelt Choileam on the original O.S. map), with Donald Cameron maybe watching his kinsmen coming and going, engaged in what little farming activity the English soldiers had not made redundant by their pillage after Culloden. Perhaps he would have peered down through a copse of birch trees, for there are many ancient stumps high up in the corries which run down to Glen Pean: trees which could have helped screen their descent late in the evening.



Charles knew Glen Pean. He had traipsed along the boggy route down to Loch Morar three months earlier, on his flight westwards from Culloden; and he was to travel the same glen yet again on his final escape from Badenoch to Glenborrodale.

Young Glenaladale fortunately managed to rejoin the party in the early hours of the morning, having travelled all night from Glenfinnan to "wherever Providence directed him which (most happily) brought him directly to the place where the Prince was". Did he dare to take the easy way via Corryhully, where the Redcoats were doubtless patrolling? Or did he also have to take a circuitous route, perhaps even following the others via Coire Odhar?



*Glen Pean and the Head of Loch Arkaig  
(Strahan) from the slopes of Sgurr Thuilm*

## "Halfway House"

Although the high point of drama for Prince Charles must have been the crossing of the Redcoat lines north of Loch Quoich two days later, from the mountaineering point of view the traverse of the south Glen Pean ridge must, for at least three reasons, count as the culmination of the trip - at least with the sort of visibility as it was my good luck to have.

First is the sheer joy of expansive views into inaccessible parts of the country. Beyond Sgurr Thuilm the Grey Corries and the Nevis range culminate in a superb view of the Carn Dearg buttress of Ben Nevis; Bidean nam Bian stands clear of Glencoe with a stature difficult to imagine from closer viewpoints. To the south, below, lies the starting point of the Prince's adventure, the monument at Glenfinnan. Beyond the railway viaduct, which is plainly visible, the eye swings away, past the Ardnamurchan hills, round to the long view down Loch Morar sealed by the mountains of Rhum; thence to the Cuillins, then a rare view of Ladhar Bheinn and the Knoydart hills brings the eye to rest on Sgurr na Ciche, which is ever-present on the next three sections of the march.



*From the ridge to Sgurr Thuilm the Prince's party could observe the next two ridges facing them before descending to the line of redcoat camps near Loch Quoich (the following night's work). Sgurr na Ciche far left.*

The second feature of the ridge is a definite feeling of "halfway there", with one of the two major climbs accomplished, and half the height and half the total distance completed by Sgurr Thuilm. All five of the remaining ridges are now visible, even if somewhat distantly in the case of Glen Shiel, if the weather is fine: and if it is not, at least a dry night in a bothy in prospect.

Finally, of course, the two mountains at each end of the ridge represent the only two Munros on the trip (except for the super-fit who decide to include an excursion to Sgurr na Ciche the next day).

A quick slither down between the green moss and black rock to inspect the "Mamnym Callum" hollows. Hard on the knees, but at least it's downhill. At this point we have to leave Charles's probable route, as the route over the Carn Mór-Monadh Gorm ridge to Glen Dessary is now covered by conifers. The alternative goes down to the bothy, and the descent via the hollow, taking a slanting line, is a pain; it is much easier to backtrack from Sgurr Thuilm westwards, then descend the pleasantly mossy Coire Dubh straight to the bothy.

The re-ascent, over Monadh Gorm to A' Chùil, is an even greater pain, especially at the end of a long, hot day. For those who don't mind an occasional "cheat", go straight down the northeast ridge of Sgurr Thuilm, to the bridge over the River Pean, and round to Glen Dessary by the excellent low level forest track.

This aside, of course, Glen Pean is a delight, backed by the cliff of Craig an Fhàraidh overhanging the river. But hopes of an hour's conversation at the bothy were soon dashed. A sleeping bag on the shelf inside, a pair of socks drying without; their owners conspicuously absent. A bathe in the river, a shirt and socks washed out. Lunch in the

sunshine while I fell to musing upon the irony of bothies: either the whole human race is there, or there is no one at all.

And sure enough, after sneezing and scratching through the flowers, horseflies and other delights of the summer meadows on Monadh Gorm, the reception committee was waiting at A' Chùil. "A lot of people staying?", I enquired of a group of sunbathers on the stile. "Well, I've got ten, and she's got ..... is it six?" Inside the bothy, over half the floor was already carpeted with sleeping bags. A dour hillwalker sternly reproofed me for missing the "obvious" forestry track from Glen Pean. Outside again, the spokesman for the sunbathers, clad mainly in plastic map bags and compasses, suggested Kinbreack, another bothy six miles in the wrong direction, at the head of Glen Kingie.

"Bothy folk", "bothy culture", I muttered to myself as two complaining feet stomped off through the bog to find a camp site. A pity really: apart from a couple of cyclists and walkers on the road above Kinlochhourn next day, these doubtless admirable and outdoor characters represented the totality of human contact during three whole days.

Six o'clock. The sun still baking. A wonderful site on sweet grass by the river. No midges. Another swim, another wash of sweaty socks. Dinner in the sunshine again. A wee dram. Visions of an early start, breakfast and a morning's swimming at Loch Quoich before a leisurely afternoon's stroll over the remaining two ridges to Loch Hourn.

Though I didn't know it then, this was to be the last supper. About eight o'clock the heat went slowly out of the sun: but not out of the air. By nine the haze was thickening onto cloud, sealing in the day's muggy warmth.

I have never encountered so many midges as I did that night. Tent inner tight shut, DMP and DEET on every surface, still they bit. Sleeping bag a pool of sweat. The choice was simple: to be bitten alive or to be stewed alive. Like a mug, I chose both.

Jolted into action by an (almost welcome) suggestion of rain at 4.30, an hour later we were away; and, for all I knew, probably screaming aloud with midge bites. Yes, "we" had spawned our own company by now: feet and I were three, engaged in a continuing little battle, though carried on for the most part as a friendly, oral combat. My other "luxury" on the journey (other than the dram, that is) was an old pair of trainers and thin socks. These proved to be no luxury, but an essential item of kit, after an unexplained bruise to one ankle. Alternating them with boots managed to keep the feet going throughout the last, long day.

After the refreshing early morning walk up the excellent forestry track, it was the turn of the boots to struggle up the meadow-bog that ascends the east side of the burn to Bealach Coire-nan-Gall. (Some SMC readers must know a better way - perhaps from nearer to Màm na Cloich' Airde? I would be grateful for suggestions.)

Clouds formed and dispersed and reformed in the valleys. Rain threatened and spat, but never really let itself go. Glen Desolate lived up to its name. Not even a sheep was visible. By eight o'clock we were looking down eerily, under a steely grey sky, onto a second bed of white woolly cloud where Loch Quoich should have been. The drips of rain at last seemed to be getting more serious, and the cagoule was dragged out of the sack, for the first time in three days. But only for twenty minutes.

### **Through the Redcoat Lines**

The first 500 feet or so down into Coire-nan-Gall need some care with a heavy load; it must have caused some consternation to Prince Charles, arriving at the bealach at midnight after a day's fitful dozing above Glen Pean. But the route is soon meandering comfortably alongside the burn, picking up a combination of stalkers' paths on either side, giving a pleasant enough walk down to the head of Loch Quoich.

But there would have been no path for Prince Charles in 1746, and it seems that Coire-nan-Gall was too remote a place, even then, to be much inhabited. The Prince arrived here at 1am, hoping to meet clansmen and to procure sustenance. He had no such luck; young Glenaladale and Donald Cameron were sent off together to find food. Meanwhile Charles hid in a "fast place in the face of a hill at the head of Lochqhuaigh, to which fastness they came about two o'clock in the morning". If this place is close to the level of the loch, I have so far failed to find it. On the other hand it has quite possibly been flooded: the loch is 100 feet higher and its western end is about two miles longer since the dams were built at either end.

Glenaladale's record states that his brother and Donald Cameron returned at 3 o'clock with "only two small cheeses that would not be a morsel to the piece of them" and the news that troops were "marching up the other side of the mountain". A pity he did not record which mountain. It was probably Druim Chòsaidh, the hill straight in front of them; but then was it not risky to climb it themselves only five hours later? Or did a messenger report that the soldiers had then retired? Or could the troops have been chasing the royal party over from Glen Dessary (unlikely, as it is an arduous march), or even over Sgurr Mòr from Glen Kingie? Glenaladale merely records that they could observe a camp in the sunshine at the head of Loch Quoich, and that the troops, who were principally engaged in rounding up "such of the poor inhabitants as had fled to the hills for shelter", searched diligently, but without effect, for the Prince.

The head of Loch Quoich, with its twin dams and, often, low water level, is as ugly as well as a dismal place. A wide jeep-track leads east to nowhere, disappearing after a couple of miles, presumably to rejoin the ancient track below the modern water level to the Kinlochquoich of old.



*Loch Quoich looking east*

The route now ascends Meall an Spàrdain, a spur of Druim Chòsaidh. To minimise the amount of tramping up soft grass it is easiest to walk about a mile and a half along the road to a small inlet, above which a rightward-slanting vague rib line leads up due north to a small bealach just west of the easternmost summit (follow the 95 easting on the modern O.S.). Charles may have crossed slightly higher up, to keep away from the Redcoat camps at the foot of Gleann Còsaidh (assuming, that is, that he already knew they were there).

The bealach gives splendid views down Gleann Còsaidh, where the Prince was able to observe the enemy camps. The time would have been between 9 and 10 o'clock (since they started at eight, and we know they moved fast). In mid-July it is not remotely dark until after 11pm, so the party must have waited a while before creeping down to pass between two sentries so close "as to hear them talk distinctly". Sgurr na Ciche again dominates the view to the south, with Ben Aden providing fine support to its right.



The north side of Druim Chòsaidh is rough and rocky. The easiest route down (other than "cheating" by using the road round the loch shore) follows a series of rightward-slanting shelves, marked by deer tracks and making for a rock rib overlooking the most easterly of the fords in the river marked on the O.S. The descent route taken by Charles and his party can only be conjectured. Did they keep higher up the glen, to avoid the enemy camps? Or were these stationed all the way up the glen and across to Barrisdale? The stream is considerable, and to cross it noiselessly in darkness must have been no easy matter.

What we do know is that the party next ascended Leac na Fearna, straight opposite, and apparently started straight down into Coire nam Beith on the north side; the original O.S. of 1897 shows a track leading down Coire am Beith from Gleann Còsaidh, and this may well have been in existence in 1746. Such a route assumes that Charles crossed the stream of Abhainn Chòsaidh near the present ford, and probably also very close to where the troops were stationed. Unless he managed to reach the track which, if it existed then, started at the waterfall to the east of the ford, the ascent of Leac na Fearna would have been a gruelling ascent. In the spring the hillside is soft enough, a mattress of springy grass; by July it has become an Alpine meadow, spread with flowers and long grass that obscure each soft footstep and harbour an abundance of horseflies: perfect for painters and photographers, but a desperate place for mountaineers.

One piece of evidence suggests that the path may not have existed in 1746, or alternatively that the fugitives did not know about it, or that they were not able to make use of it. For it seems that it was on Leac na Fearna that the Prince stumbled over a precipice in the dark, and nearly fell to his death. Glenaladale's account suggests that this occurred near the top of the ascent; the account of his nephew (Borrodale's son) has the fall taking place on the descent. While in most respects the former's account appears to be the most trustworthy, it seems more logical that the incident occurred on the very rough and dark descent into Coire nam Beith. (The second account is also backed up by Donald Cameron.)



*Descending Leac na  
Fearna towards  
Kinlochhourn*

By now in trainers once more, it was just after 2pm when we reached the top and looked down towards Kinlochhourn. A light breeze stirred, the first of the day, just enough to keep the flies and midges at bay for an hour's dozing: catch up a little with the previous night. But the sky remained overcast, the air heavy and basically still. The prospect of a second night's camping in such conditions, especially in the horribly midgy glen above Kinlochhourn, was anything but tempting. The only alternative was to keep walking: to rest was to be eaten.

Fortunately feet and ankles had responded to the exchange dialogue. Feet felt fine, legs OK. We had not dared discuss the issue before now, during the three long climbs: but gradually during this final descent the conviction formed that we should push on further for the night. There is for instance a lochan where we could camp right at the top of Bealach Sgoireadail.

The descent is rough and boggy, and Prince Charles must have enjoyed it at 1 o'clock in the morning, probably, as we have seen, nearly ending his career over a precipice. From the lower part of Coire nam Beith the route is another conundrum. The party passed between two camps on the road below. The SMC's research suggests that they passed just east of Loch Shuibhe in Coire Hoo (Coire na Uamha). If, however, they had known the camps' positions (by their fires, for example, as suggested by Blaikie), would they have dared to continue straight down the road from Coire nam Beith to Coire Hoo? If not, they would have had to traverse out of Coire nam Beith at a high level, crossing two extremely rocky corries to the west, including several wet and mossy slabs twenty feet high and more, all of this in the dark, and now in terrain where their guide Donald Cameron was no longer fully at home. Glenaladale's record suggests that this is what they in fact did: for he says that they went a little bit westward at some point on the descent of Leac na Fearna. Even with the traverse, they would have needed to expose themselves to a mile-long section of open road.

Having finally, or so they thought, made themselves safe "skulking" in the woods above Kinlochhourn, none of them realised until the next day that they were still "within cannon-shot of two small camps", when they saw a party of Redcoats getting in some "muttons."



## The Final Escape

The Kinlochhourn road is surprisingly hard on the feet after a long day out. By contrast, the footpath up into Coire Sgoireadail is a joy - especially coming after the three vertical bogs already ascended. Tea was called at five, at a nice midge-free site in the middle of the river bed. A strategic debate was held with feet, ankles, boots and trainers. Two long cups of tea beguiled them into a unanimous decision to go for Glen Shiel the same evening; and to fight in boots. Trainers would follow in reserve, one pace behind, as they were now very smelly. Faithful sunhat sealed the decision by pouring another draught from the billy. And the first midge of the evening stung the party into action fifteen minutes before the official starting time of 6pm.

The die was cast. But what a contrast to Prince Charles's ascent, which he found the most difficult of all. According to the SMC guide they "stumbled up Coire Sgoireadail in pitch darkness". "The darkest night ever in my life I travelled", recorded John MacDonald, Borrodale's son. While it would be surprising if there had not been any sort of a path, none is shown on the 1897 O.S. Certainly the Prince could have had nothing like the conditions under foot provided by the excellent track that serves the glen now. The upper section of this path carves an elaborate roller coaster route through a jumble of twisted cliffs and boulders. No wonder Charles and his party, in the dark and now effectively guideless, had trouble.

Alternatively, Blaikie avers that they must have used the easier path via Coire Mhalagain, to the west, which was then inhabited. This route passes between Sgurr na Signe and the Saddle.

My route lay via Coire Sgoireadail, however. The track clambers quickly to the bealach, below the lochan. Time 6.45. Whether to camp at the lochan (which was a little way above, not quite visible), or to proceed? One more pass, only another 900 feet up. The choice was obvious, really. Below, only one more decision needed to be made: to drop 500 feet to

pick up the Glen Quoich path on the other side of the valley opposite, or to make a haggis-footed traverse losing fewer feet and gaining the path half a mile further up towards Bealach Duibh Leac. Being mean, I hate to lose height; legs agreed heartily, and amazingly feet and ankles complied, both of them.

At the floor of the corrie we ran into a high Alpine rock garden, among jumbled boulders that could easily have come from a bothy tumbled years ago. Now only flowers mark the past.

The traverse meets the main path at a cairn where the latter crosses the small burn from right to left. Another half hour's toil, and we were finally seated at the top of Bealach Duibh Leac. Eight o'clock and indeed in celebratory mood. Dark views back over Sgurr a' Mhaoraidh and the south Glen Shiel hills. A dram all round, to feet, to faithful hat, to Prince Charles and to each of his gallant party, to the hills we had left behind, to the enchanting and empty glens, to the sun yesterday morning shining on Loch Beoraid.

And a final dram to Glen Shiel, dark down below, to the lowering Sisters of Kintail in front, and to the high hills further east, above Cluanie, where Charles had next to flee. There could be no stopping for him, whatever the rigours of the past five days. A shiver of a breeze from nowhere brought the faint sound of a Piobaireachd: the Urlar that starts and then repeats itself at the end of the lament flooded over the gloomy view. In the ancient Highland culture, every ending is a beginning. The circle was complete.

At last it began to rain. We started the final, twisting plunge down the rough corrie, soaking up the rain with joy. A herd of deer fed in a late evening pool: it was their own territory, and they moved away slowly, only with the greatest of reluctance. Down we ambled in the rain. If not for Prince Charles, at least for me and my feet the long march was over.



*To safety at last: Cave of the 7 Men of Glenmoriston, Sgurr nan Connhairean, north of Glenshiel*

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## References:

The SMC guide refers to W.B. Blaikie's "Itinerary of Charles Edward Stuart", which is published by the Department of Scottish History of Glasgow University. This proved vital in obtaining a reasonable understanding of the route, with its seemingly odd deviations and timings. The book is based largely upon evidence collected shortly after the 1745 rising by Bishop Forbes and published in three volumes in the "Lyon in Mourning"; unfortunately only Volume 2 is still available in print. The principal source for the Moidart/Glen Shiel section in the bishop's collection is a full and detailed account by Captain Alexander MacDonald of Glenaladale, who was one of the first Highlanders to commit himself to the Prince's Cause. This record is followed fairly exactly by Blaikie, in distinction to somewhat more sporadic and differing accounts given by other witnesses, including Donald Cameron of Glen Pean. For instance Donald Cameron's account does refer to mist in one place, but this is not corroborated by Glenaladale's generally more reliable account.

## Deviations from Prince Charles's Route

The main deviations and omissions that I made from the route probably followed by Prince Charles were:

1. Starting from the road near Beasdale Station (omitting the 1-mile walk from Arisaig House at Glenborrodale.)
2. Not descending to Meoble from "Prince Charlie's Cave" (which I have assumed to be what some of the literature describes as "MacEachine's Refuge"), but camping on the bealach above.
3. Leaving the sack at the foot of An Sutha/Fraoch-bheinn and returning there, then descending straight down to Kinlochbeoraid (it is possible that the Prince may have taken a more direct line from the top of Fraoch-bheinn to Coire Odhar, though a brief inspection of the terrain suggests he may well have been forced to follow much the same route as I took).
4. There is some confusion and there are several gaps in the records as to how Charles got from Coire Odhar to Loch Quoich. I followed what seemed to be the only logical route which squares with Blaikie, with one exception: a forestry plantation covers his route between Glen Pean and Glen Dessary, and to cross this ridge I was forced to go further west and higher than the Prince, via the two bothies in the respective glens.
5. Loch Quoich is now two miles longer at its western end, and 100 feet higher, than it was in 1746, having been dammed.

## Footnotes

1. In 1746 the British still operated the Julian Calendar, which lagged eleven days behind the Gregorian Calendar used on the Continent. Since then we have "caught up" the eleven days.
2. H. MacInnes: "West Highland Walks - One"