

JONATHAN JAMIESON

# OUTDOOR JOURNAL

VOLUME II: 2016

*I've seen the high Ben Lomond a-towerin' tae the moon  
I've been by Creiff and Callendar and roond by bonnie Doune.  
I've seen Loch Ness' silvery tides, an' places ill tae ken:  
Far up intae the snowy north lies Urquhart's fairy glen.  
Traditional*

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## *Preface*

The Outdoor Journal is finished for its second year. The writing process has become easier with time because many templates have been created and the format has become more certain. Unfortunately this year has seen considerably less trips and adventures to write about than last year. The summer months flew by and with hindsight, more should have been planned. Highlights from the last twelve months include climbing Goatfell (on my first visit to Arran) and the West Highland Way; the latter being a walk I should have done a long time ago but hope to do again soon (with better weather!). As my PhD comes to an end in March 2017 I'm not sure where I will live next year. Proximity to the hills will be high on my list of considerations but regardless, I'll be sure to get out and about.

## Stob Glas – not quite Cruach Ardrain

IT WAS THE FIRST WALK of the year and we hoped the anniversary of Ben Venue would be a good omen for similar weather. The days leading up to Saturday had been promising, Thursday and Friday had blue skies all day and the forecast at the start of the week was positive. Alas, it wasn't to be! The forecast on Friday suggested there would snow and the weather would be changeable so at least we had some warning. The original plan was to climb Stob Glas before continuing to the summit of Cruach Ardrain but we decided to turn back prematurely.



Statistics	
Distance	13.92 km
Time	8h:23m
Average Speed	1.7 km/h
Elevation	176 m
Min. Altitude	961 m
Max. Attitude	826 m

Snow quick.

The day began with a surprise, Ross arrived early! David and I must have encouraged him turn a new leaf for the new year. He caught me unaware and I had to rush my final preparations for the day but fortunately I remembered everything.



I'm an ice unicorn!



Chasing Ross down (with my ice axe).

The first few miles of our walk was in a valley that included a river crossing and icicle shenanigans. The weather was fine until we started gaining altitude. The wind had picked up during lunch and the visibility got worse the further we went. There was plenty of snow on the ground but it was very soft which made the going very slow. We were not that far from the summit of Cruach Ardrain when we decided to pack it in and make sure we were off the hill before sunset. Not the best start to the year but we were glad to get out, hopefully 2016 has better in store for us.



Didn't make it to the top.

23<sup>rd</sup> January 2016

## Cathkin Braes – Saturday morning pedal

ON THEIR WEBSITE, CATHKIN BRAES is billed as a “world class” mountain biking track. I think this is a little optimistic. However, it’s close to Glasgow and offers an all-weather 5 km that’s quite good. I prefer the scenery at Mugdock and the area is nicer (Cathkin Braes is neighbours with Castlemilk, an area of Glasgow with a less than wonderful reputation) but the forest tracks get very muddy after just a small amount of rain. Cathkin Braes is popular, there were lots of cyclists out enjoying the rain-free day.

Statistics	
Distance	5.41 km
Time	0h:35m
Average Speed	9.2 km/h
Elevation	112 m
Min. Altitude	140 m
Max. Attitude	200 m

Goal: half an hour or less.



I sat on the bench by the car park to give my legs a rest after the pedal up to Cathkin Braes from Croftfoot Station and prepared my action camera (unfortunately I ended up pointing it too low so I won’t use the footage). Once I had got my breath back I set off for my first loop. Just after passing through the tunnel there is a rock garden I particularly like. The first time I encountered it, I got off to investigate before attempting it. One of my goals for this trip was to do it first time — and I did! From there the track continues descending to arguably the main section, a dual slalom descent that should make anyone smile. There is a short climb (the total elevation is only 112 m for the whole track) back up to a tower. I managed to get caught up between a few groups of cyclists and, never one to resist a challenge, I made an effort to keep up. This was successful, I even overtook a few, until the descending began again. Without the ability to free wheel I succumbed and let them past. The rest of the circuit went by without any incident except the giant fallen tree blocking the path and a rock garden that now has a river flowing over it! I did one and half more loops before pedalling down to the station.

The sign says “Double Dare”. I might petition for the name to be changed to reflect the single wheel users.



I did two and a half loops.

## *Conic Hill – photography session*

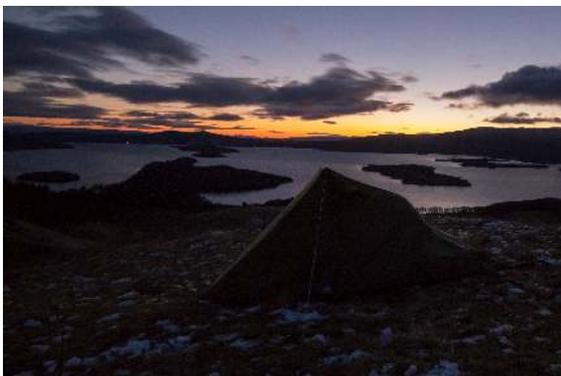
EMMA HAS BEEN SPENDING lots of time using her camera (I suspect an expensive upgrade will happen soon) and wanted to go somewhere with a nice sunset for a photography session. I have passed Conic Hill many times on the way to Ben Lomond but never climbed it before. This was probably a mistake because for remarkably little effort you are treated to a beautiful view of Loch Lomond and its islands. Conic Hill has a pleasantly rounded summit and is situated near the little town of Balmaha.



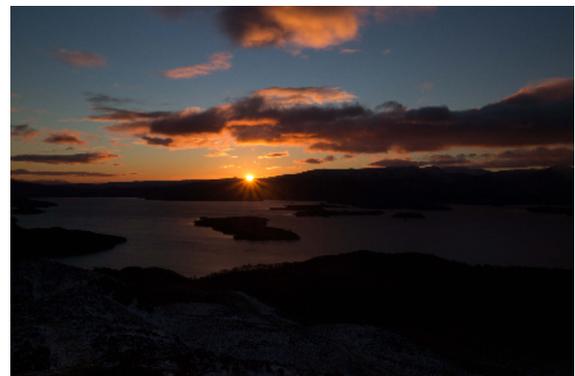
Statistics	
Distance	4.21 km
Time	4h:33m
Average Speed	0.9 km/h
Elevation	328 m
Min. Altitude	329 m
Max. Attitude	48 m

We didn't move much.

I decided to leave Emma on a lower point and climbed a little further on with Kim to set up my tripod. A nice timelapse of the sunset was my goal but a higher frequency of photos would have been beneficial and a sturdier tripod to reduce shake; my tripod even fell over and got some shots of the sky! Not my finest moment.



The tent was up to keep us warm.



Maybe a few too many clouds but still a good sunset.

After the sunset we regrouped and I set up my tent to keep us warm while we waited for it to get dark enough for astro-photography. The sky wasn't looking good because the cloud was coming in. We had a cramped dinner (it's a two man tent and even then it's a squeeze). However, without a tent it is just a bit too cold wait around when the wind is blowing. After an hour or two the conditions improved and the cloud cleared a little bit. By this point none of us could be bothered staying much longer anyway so Kim started to walk down whilst Emma and I took a few photos and packed up the tent. None of mine came out very well, I need a lot more practice of astro-photography.



A great view of Loch Lomond.

27<sup>th</sup> February 2016*Kelvin Walkway, Mugdock & The Whangie – three in a day*

THIS WAS ONE OF the more complicated days out we've had. There were different activities, with people turning up at different times with different methods of transport. It was definitely worth it because the weather was lovely for late February. David, Margit and I started the day by walking to Mugdock Country Park. We followed the usual route along the Kelvin walkway with one crucial detour, we went to Dobbie's Garden Centre. It's about as middle class as it gets for us, buying fancy (but very reasonably priced) bread at a bakery halfway through a walk! David had prepared a tortilla the day before so it was the perfect accompaniment to our lunch by Mugdock Reservoir near the Drumclog car park. The break in the bad weather we've been having recently brought out lots of walkers looking to enjoy the sun. Kim was lucky to arrive just as a car was leaving so she got a space, Ross was not so lucky and had to park further up the road. Once we had everyone together we started our walk in Mugdock.



All on a tree.



Giving David a hug.

After walking to the castle, decorating David's bag with branches and climbing a few trees, we drove to The Whangie. I had been once before (after visiting The Devil's Pulpit last year) and the strange rock feature was as good as ever. It's a hard to describe, but a well hidden gash in the rock allows you to walk through a narrow cleft for about 30 m. We posed for some more photos, had some snacks and waited for the sunset that was obscured by clouds. Thankfully we still had the home-made pizzas at Kim's flat to look forward to, a pleasant end to a long day.



At The Whangie.

## Glasgow to Helensburgh – via Balloch

THE EXCURSION FROM THE DAY before had only served to whet my appetite for the outdoors this weekend. I decided to run one of my favourite routes that follows the Clyde Canal Path to Balloch and extend the day by continuing to Helensburgh. This extension is a section of the Three Lochs Way that I ran last year and it was nice to be back there again albeit running in the other direction. I even remembered to get a photo of the route marker design for the previous journal article on the way.

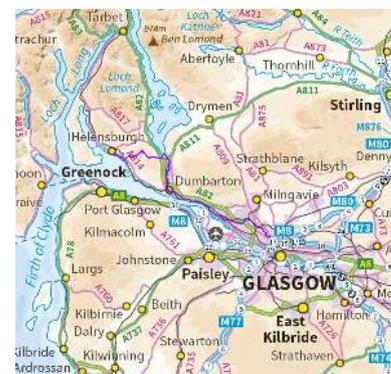
Statistics	
Distance	45.85 km
Time	7h:01m
Average Speed	6.5 km/h
Elevation	494 m
Min. Altitude	1 m
Max. Attitude	267 m

Second furthest run ever.



I haven't done much long distance running so the pace was gentle. Even so, by the time I passed Balloch I had slowed down considerably. A combination of hunger and fatigue reduced me to a fast walking pace. The weather was even better than the day before but when I stopped running I started to cool down and my mind started to dream of a nice warm shower! By the time I arrived to the outskirts of Helensburgh I was very hungry so I bought six potato scones. They were eaten one after the other in less than a minute! Hot drinks are not my usual cup of tea (pun intended) but I made an exception and bought a hot chocolate before going to the station. That helped warm me up but annoyingly the waiting room was shut so until the train arrived I was still a bit cold. I made it back to the flat eventually and had a very early night.

Just passed Balloch.



Quite a long run.

4<sup>th</sup> March 2016*Stob Ghabhar – last winter walk of the season*

TALK OF WINTER CAMPING on a hill in the snow never came to fruition this year. This was the first overnight trip we had and I hesitate to call it camping because Ross and David slept in the car while I took so many blankets I was warmer in the tent than I am in my flat! The drive from Glasgow on Friday night took a few hours to our camping spot near Bridge of Orchy. We parked the car in a lay-by near the West Highland Way that serves as an unofficial and superb camping area. The ground is flat, there is a nearby river and during the daytime, the scenery is fantastic! We made a little fire from some wood we bought at a petrol station (very authentic & traditional) and cooked our dinner. We had the place to ourselves as we relaxed and watched the stars.



Sitting round the fire.



David was the first to get up in the morning because he had some important business to attend to. By the time we had eaten our breakfast (porridge and bagels), packed up the car and searched for Ross's missing water bottle it was almost 10am. I would like it to be known that it was only thanks to me bringing two spare water bottles that David and Ross were to do that walk, having both forgotten their own!



Posing on the summit of Stob Ghabhar.

The start of the walk was along open ground by a river called Abhainn Shira. There were fluffy clouds in a blue sky and the sun was shining on the snowy peaks, a cracking start to the day! We followed the path round the eastern side of Aonach Eagach (not the spectacular Aonach Eagach ridge near Glencoe) before climbing up to Couloir Buttress. I don't have any pictures of the climb but it was quite steep, we made foot holds using the ice-axes to get to the top which was tiring work.



Statistics	
Distance	16.0 km
Time	7h:35m
Average Speed	2.1 km/h
Elevation	924 m
Min. Altitude	173 m
Max. Altitude	1063 m

Some good climbing.

There was a very short ridge to pass (left) before climbing to Stob Ghabhar. There were some hidden, icy patches so care was needed to make it safely to the top. Margit had prepared flapjacks for us so we were well-fuelled on the final ascent. The clouds had started to come in by the time we summited but the view was still good.

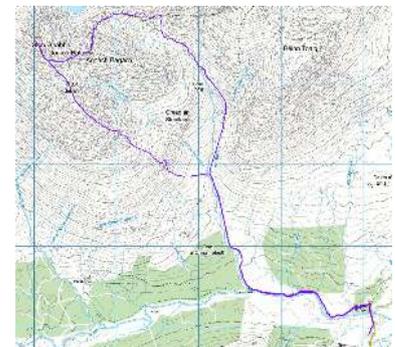


Looking south in the direction of Glen Orchy.



The path round the eastern side of Aonach Eagach.

As we descended there were some wonderful opportunities for sledging without a sledge. It really is the only way to get down a snowy mountain. With care of course, it's possible to gain considerable momentum and make quick progress down the slopes. We passed a little hut that is apparently available for renting and would make a great base for a short hill walking holiday. None of us had anything for dinner so we stopped at Tyndrum and had fish and chips in the Real Food Cafe. Due to a communication breakdown between Ross and David, between them they managed to bring about 30 little pots of ketchup to our table. I think we'll be remembered as the weirdos who took all the tomato sauce.



Covered a good distance!

20<sup>th</sup> March 2016

### *Paddling on Loch Lomond – Ciara makes an appearance*

TAKING MY ROLE AS the third wheel seriously I accompanied Ross and Ciara for some paddling on Loch Lomond at our usual spot. The car park was very busy and we were lucky to get a space, half of Glasgow seemed to be out enjoying the sunny Sunday. David was busy writing and worrying about his thesis so he chose not to join us. I squeezed in the middle of the boat and rested while the pair paddle us across to a very small island. Although it was a bright day there was still a chill in the air and the water had a winter feel to it. My water-shoes didn't offer much warmth so my toes got chilly quickly. Also, I am grateful to Ross for lending me his dad's vintage wetsuit but it's dungaree style so my upper body deeply resented going into the water. It's time to get my own soon.



Reflections in the sunglasses.



On our little island.

I was glad to be paddling on the return trip back to the shore. However, Ciara and I are apparently unable to work as a team because the kayak spent a lot of time spinning around in circles. Somehow we got there eventually and after pulling the boat up the beach we brought the Waboba ball out for some bouncing fun. Our water games didn't last very long because we needed to get back and our limbs were getting numb from the cold. These trips to Loch Lomond are fun but it's the plan to paddle Scotland's highest mountain loch, Loch Etchachan, that I'm really looking forward to enjoying. This summer we plan to carry the kayak up and splash around.



Feet up and relaxing.

## Goatfell – first time on Arran

I CAN'T BELIEVE I hadn't been to Arran until this trip! If you're reading this and in Scotland then you must pay this little island a visit. From Glasgow Central Station you can catch a train to Ardrossan before taking a ferry across the water to Arran. The whole journey takes about two hours and the combined ticket for the train and ferry is very reasonably priced. After arriving in Brodick you can look around the town, get a bus to other parts of the island or start your outdoor adventure. It is possible to cycle round the entire island in a day and the mountain biking is supposed to be good too. I will definitely be back sometime during the summer with my unicycle.



Leaving Ardrossan Harbour.



We were there to climb the highest mountain on the island, Goatfell, a name I find particularly amusing. From the Gaelic word *gaoth* the name would mean "Mountain of Wind" (which I believe Ross was using as an excuse). Alternatively, the Norse *geita* would be "Goat Mountain". At 874 m it is one of four Corbetts on the island and on a clear day Ireland can be seen from the summit.



Ross standing proud on an outcrop during the descent.

From the ferry we followed the path by the sea that goes through the golf course to Brodick Castle where the main path up Goatfell begins. There were lots of walkers on the hill – it was a fine day. After climbing for a short time we gained enough height to look over the trees near sea level to Brodick Bay. The path was easy to follow and clearly marked so we made quick progress. At about 600 m the route got steeper and more rocky but it's a climb suitable for most abilities.



Statistics	
Distance	18.86 km
Time	7h:05m
Average Speed	2.7 km/h
Elevation	939 m
Min. Altitude	2 m
Max. Attitude	854 m

We did stop to paddle.

On a clear day it should be possible to see Ireland from the summit. The skies were clear but none of us could make out The Emerald Isle. We did see Campbelltown, where David and Margit would holiday at the following weekend. A viewpoint table helps identify the surroundings.



Descending from Goatfell to The Saddle.



The sun setting behind Arran.

David submitted his thesis a few days before the walk and to celebrate we prepared a small feast for the top. I brought bread from my bread machine and David made a tortilla the day before. But it was Ross who brought David's real treat, two bottles of his home-brewed beer! When he produced them from his bag it clicked, that's why he was so keen for us to take the train instead of driving! A mention of Margit's flapjacks must also be made. According to David she likes traditions and he has worked hard to establish the flapjacks as one. It's a sneaky game but I think it worked! On the way down we had time to stop for a paddle in Glen Rosa at a beautiful spot. Before catching the ferry we emptied the Co-Op of the reduced pastry products and had them for dinner. The return journey to the mainland was lovely, we sat in the warmth and admired the sun setting behind Arran.



Tucking into lunch.

## *Beinn Eich, Doune Hill & Beinn Dubh – on the hills with David*

WITH ROSS ON HOLIDAY in Skye (again), David and I were left to make our own plans for the weekend. We caught the 6:43am bus to Luss on Saturday in the glorious morning sunshine. After taking a few pictures on the pier we started our walk by following Luss Water in Glen Luss. It was a gentle start to the day and because it was still early there was nobody else around. Eventually we left the road and started climbing Beinn Eich. Most of the sheep had lambs and, with their young, they carefully watched us go by their young.



Statistics	
Distance	19.64 km
Time	6h:26m
Average Speed	3.0 km/h
Elevation	1383 m
Min. Altitude	15 m
Max. Attitude	724 m

Good stats today.

From the summit we descended a short way before climbing again to Doune Hill, the highest point of the day, where we had lunch. It was then we first missed Ross because apparently Margit only makes flapjack when we're all together! There was a fierce wind on the summit so I was glad when we started descending to Glen Molloch.

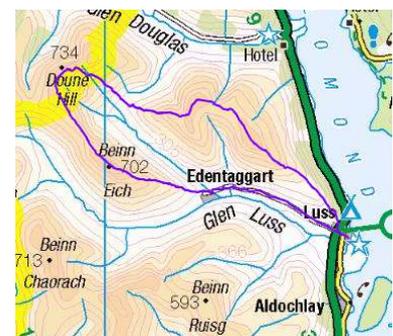


Luss Water meanders impressively in Gleann na Caorainn.



A beautiful view towards Loch Lomond during lunch.

While we were climbing Mid Hill, David told me that on his first birthday in Glasgow Margit carried all his presents up this hill to surprise him at the top of Beinn Dubh. I'm not sure if he was expecting something from me but it wasn't his birthday and I don't love him as much as Margit. Once we made it to the top of Mid Hill all ascending was done and we just needed to walk past Coire na h-Eanachan to Beinn Dubh. When we got back to Luss David agreed to get an ice cream too and commented that his Spanish friends would think it very strange to wear a jacket whilst eating one. I think that living in Scotland has made him hardier but also more appreciative of the good weather when it does come!



Three hills, no munros.

15<sup>th</sup> May 2016

## *Banana Boating on Loch Lomond – splashes and crashes*

EVER SINCE I SAW a group banana boating from Luss I wanted to try. Neither my friends nor I were particularly keen for a winter ride because lochs in Scotland are cold through summer, let alone the middle of January! The past few weeks have been reasonably warm so we decided now was the time. Kim decided she still didn't feel like joining us in the water but Loch Lomond Leisure offered to take her on the motor boat towing us. She filmed us from there and I had my trusty action camera on a floating selfie-stick onboard so we had footage from all angles!



One of two crashes.

The ride lasted 30 minutes and the time flew by. I was wearing my brand new 5mm wetsuit that was wonderfully warm. It took some considerable effort to tip the boat over for the first capsize, they are remarkably stable. I eventually managed, to my great delight! The speed was surprisingly fast and we all felt we got our money's worth. Afterwards we played with the Waboba ball in the water before enjoying a picnic.



Ben Lomond looking glorious to the right.

*Ben Vorlich – this time with Kris*

WORKING IN MACCLESFIELD for the past year, Kris has been missing the quality mountain air of Scotland. He was up to Glasgow for the long May Day weekend and with Amy busy on Sunday it fell to me to entertain him. So together we took the bus to Ardlui, a hamlet at the northern end of Loch Lomond. Our route had us first ascending Stob na Coinnich Bhacain where we chased and captured a half-inflated, Disney, helium balloon that I promptly tied to Kris's bag. He looked very classy.

Statistics	
Distance	12.63 km
Time	5h:37m
Average Speed	2.2 km/h
Elevation	1016 m
Min. Altitude	16 m
Max. Attitude	933 m

Lifted by a balloon.



From there, we made the final climb to Ben Vorlich. On the way we passed one of the last patches of snow and ice in the Southern Highlands. It's not every day you can go sledging and get sunburnt at the same time in Scotland! The north-eastern side of Ben Vorlich that we ascended is far quieter than the busy path from Inveruglas. I think there are two reasons for this, the first being the well defined path on the Inveruglas side of the mountain. Secondly, the view is far superior because you can admire Loch Lomond stretching to the south. With that said, the point-to-point route we did using the buses was great because there was no need to double back.

Southern view of Loch Lomond.



Ardlui to Inveruglas



Kris with his balloon.



The boys on Ben Vorlich.

14<sup>th</sup> July 2016

*West Highland Way Day 1 – Milngavie to Conic Hill*

THE WEST HIGHLAND WAY has been on my list of walks for years. I've met lots of people who don't even go hiking often who have completed the route so it was about time I joined the club. The long Glasgow Fair Weekend was the perfect opportunity although the forecast was not too promising. My usual partners in crime where unavailable (Ross and David have already done the WHW anyway), so it was by myself I took the train to Milngavie and started my walk at 2:00pm on Thursday afternoon.

Statistics	
Distance	28.92 km
Time	5h:50m
Average Speed	4.9 km/h
Elevation	610 m
Min. Altitude	23 m
Max. Attitude	320 m

Strong start to the walk.



The start of the WHW is very familiar to me, Mugdock has been a favourite mountain uni-cycle haunt for a few years. I have also run around the forest many times and even gone as far as Dumgoyne a couple of times. So it was a few hours' walking before I entered unfamiliar ground and headed toward Drymen.

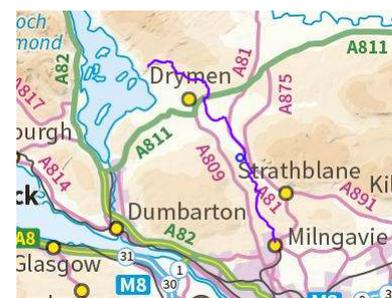


The official start of the West Highland Way.



Dumgoyne and Loch Lomond in the distance.

Drymen is usually the first night's stop on the WHW. I didn't have a strict plan to follow but I wanted to complete the route reasonably quickly; four days was the goal and most people take about six or seven. Carrying my two-man tent I was safe in the knowledge I could pitch up anywhere suitable and didn't need to worry about making bookings. Feeling good, I passed Drymen and continued towards Balmaha. Unfortunately the freedom of wild camping is denied along much of the eastern side of Loch Lomond by a local by-law so I knew my progress would be curtailed for the evening. This was no great loss because Conic Hall had beautiful evening views of Loch Lomond and I was ready to rest anyway.



A good start to the walk.

## West Highland Way Day 2 – Conic Hill to Crianlarich

THE DAY STARTED WELL, it wasn't raining! The forecast for Friday I had not been good so I wondered if the weather gods were smiling on me. I awoke at 6am and spent an hour eating some porridge and preparing my stuff. I marched down the hill to Balmaha and the side of Loch Lomond which I would be skirting the side of for most of the day. A few runners were out but most of the walkers were still asleep. I hadn't walked this area but have been by car to Ben Lomond and kayaking at Milarrochy Bay.



Statistics	
Distance	48.63 km
Time	12h:02m
Average Speed	4.0 km/h
Elevation	1218 m
Min. Altitude	12 m
Max. Altitude	337 m

Longest walking time so far.

The feel of rain was growing in the air and at 10am a light drizzle began. This lasted for half an hour and I was thinking "great!" because it wasn't anywhere near enough to get me wet. However, the rain got gradually stronger. This was no sudden, torrential, tropical downpour but instead followed Scotland's proud



Ardlui was nearly covered in clouds.



Tortellini for lunch at Inversnaid.

precipitation heritage and got steadily stronger. It was not possible to mark precisely of being officially 'wet' but there was no going back once it had occurred! The bonnie banks of Loch Lomond were decidedly dreary with a grey outlook. The path after Rowardennan is rocky and undulates, making it deceptively tiring to walk because no great elevation is reached. So it was with more than a little pleasure I left the great loch and headed towards Crianlarich. There was even a break in the weather and from the late afternoon until evening only light drizzle fell. Realising it would be foolhardy to press on for Tyndrum, I stopped in Ewich Forest near Crianlarich for the night.



A day by the loch.

16<sup>th</sup> July 2016

*West Highland Way Day 3 – Crianlarich to Kinlochleven*

AFTER A PEACEFUL NIGHT’S sleep I awoke to the rarest of Scottish summer sights, a patch of blue sky! *And* it was in the direction I would be heading. Not wanting to squander such an opportunity I finished my porridge and was on the trail before 7am. After picking up some snacks from Tyndrum I walked along the Old Military Road next to the railway line and reached Bridge of Orchy late-morning. I had managed to dry my shirt, jacket and trousers and the sky still looked promising.

Statistics	
Distance	49.37 km
Time	11h:13m
Average Speed	4.4 km/h
Elevation	1127 m
Min. Altitude	155 m
Max. Attitude	548 m

Almost 50km!



Alas, it wasn’t to last. As I began the section where the path crosses Rannoch Moor the wind and rain began. If anywhere on the walk should have such weather then the moor and Glencoe should be it so I accepted the situation as the true experience. I almost stopped at the Glencoe Mountain Resort when the rain



Where we camped when we climbed Stob Ghabhar.



Stob Ghabhar (left) & Stob a Choire Odhair (right).

turned torrential but decided to press on. After crossing the A82 and passing King’s House a few kilometres bring you to the base of the Devil’s Staircase. The weather was thankfully back to light rain so I eagerly hit the ascent. I soon met two Dutch ladies descending who warned me of the weather but either it had got a lot better or they weren’t used to our climate because it wasn’t too bad. I had expected something more exciting from the name *Devil’s Staircase* but I soon summited and pressed on towards Kinlochleven. In the end I didn’t reach the town that night after spotting a nice spot on the road to pitch my tent. I had covered nearly 100 km in two days so I knew I could finish the route on Sunday.



Passed the halfway point.

### West Highland Way Day 4 – Kinlochleven to Fort William

THIS WAS TO BE THE shortest day's distance, my hard work for the past few days had brought me close to the finish. I'm not sure if it was because I again left early in the morning or the abysmal weather, but I saw very few hikers on the trail. The rain coming down at glen of the Allt Nathrach was something else. Numerous water crossings were now completely submerged, there was no chance of keeping my feet dry so I accepted my fate. What should have been a spectacular view was a grey blur.

Statistics	
Distance	26.52 km
Time	6h:25m
Average Speed	4.1 km/h
Elevation	615 m
Min. Altitude	13 m
Max. Altitude	332 m

A short final day.



As the path began to head north once more the weather improved but the visibility did not. The guides claim Ben Nevis should have come into sight – it did not. No, there were still a few hours through felled plantations before I got close enough! My legs did not appreciate the long, road descent to Glen Nevis. Indeed, I was convinced the gradient had been optimised for maximum discomfort to my thighs. I don't walk with poles, this was one of the few times I wished I had a pair to hand. The chill from the rain combined with fatigue drove me through the final few kilometres along the road. Of course, when the end eventually came it was a bit of anti-climax! On another day I might have sat on the bench and watched the world with smug satisfaction, but changing into warm clothes was all I had on my mind.

The end of the WHW.



Final section!

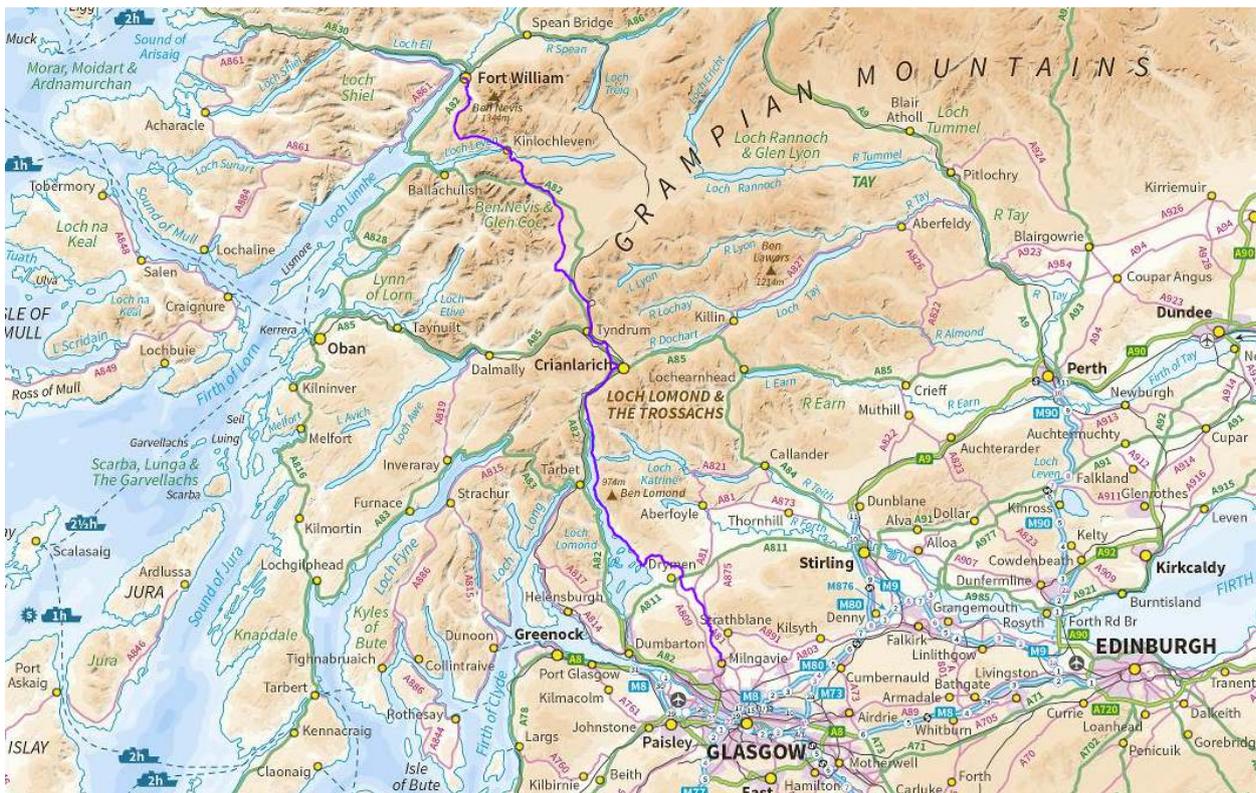
18<sup>th</sup> July 2016

## West Highland Way – post-mortem

95 MILES OF WALKING and all I have to show for it is tired legs and a couple of photographs! That would be grossly underselling my experience; despite the weather I enjoyed hike and would recommend the route to anyone. This was highlighted clearly on the bus journey home when we left the rain in Fort William. The bus follows a similar route to the WHW and the scenery was nothing short of spectacular. The visibility was good and a few clouds hung around to emphasise the wild and dramatic landscape.

Statistics	
Distance	153.4 km
Time	35h:31m
Average Speed	4.3 km/h
Elevation	3569 m
Min. Altitude	12 m
Max. Altitude	548 m

The entire route.



The WHW race has been on my mind for a while. It's not something I will attempt in the near future, a significant amount of training and experience is necessary but it would be wonderful to do. In the meantime I will investigate the other long distances trails around Scotland. On the whole I chose my equipment wisely but there is room for some refinement. Weight reduction really is the key because a light pack makes for a happy hiker. I also used fell-running shoes because the path didn't require full boots. The four days or so it took me is less than most would take and there are plenty more places to stop but when I am on my own I enjoy pressing on at a comfortable pace. Of course, a route march is not to everyone's taste!

Milngavie to Fort William.



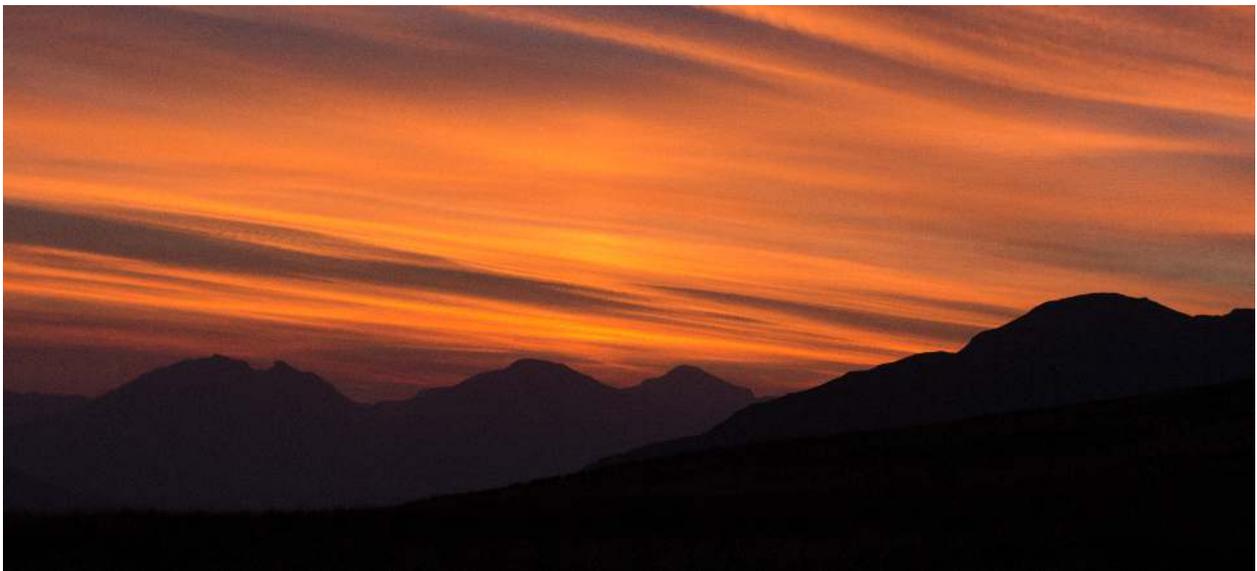
Drying the gear in the garden.

16<sup>th</sup> August 2016*Ben Lomond – weeknight camp*

WE FINALLY GOT OUT AND DID IT, a weeknight camping trip on Ben Lomond. This trip has been talked about for ages so it was with a great relief the weather played ball. Ciara decided to join us, with David still away she was an honorary dominguera. That made me the third wheel but I coped. The evening started with a swim in the loch at Rowardennan car park, it was one of the only times other people have been swimming too! After packing the wetsuits back in the car (no we didn't climb Ben Lomond in them) we started the climb to the top. A few minutes into the walk the path was diverted because the path is being improved.



Pre-climb swim.



Sunset over the Arrochar Alps.

Of course this is a good thing, the old one was getting worn and needed repaired. Unfortunately the diversion not only took longer but had us passing through a particularly muddy section, I can't imagine how bad that bit was a few weeks ago after the heavy rain. We eventually got back to the main path and continued to climb towards Sron Aonich. My memory of previous climbs had us reaching the flat section much sooner than we did. A food stop just before the plateau brought the energy levels back up and Ross drew our attention to his 'angry' t-shirt.

The view of the sunset over the Arrochar Alps was beautiful as we walked the flat section before the final ascent. I had hoped to be at the top but couldn't complain with what I saw. A few runners descending the mountain past us and a tent were all we saw. Just as we were reaching the point where the path begins to ascend steeply a wisp of misty cloud blew past. I assumed we would walk right through it because the hill had been completely clear for the whole time but it wasn't to be. That little cloud was the harbinger of a dense cloud that stayed with us to the summit.



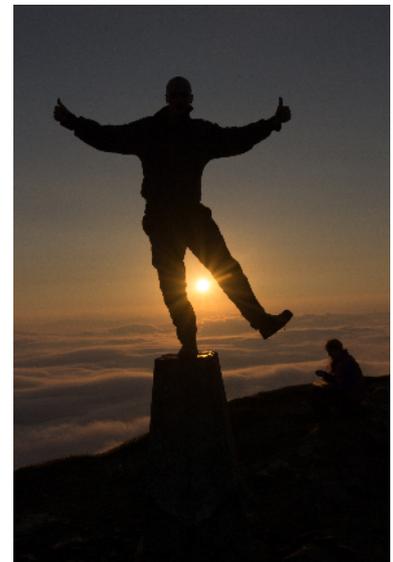
Ross's angry t-shirt.



After pitching the tents on the path to the west of the summit because the wind was intense at the top, we enjoyed a very late dinner. A few stars were visible through the cloud but not enough to make it worth attempting proper astro-photography. Even if it had been clear I'm not sure I'd have stayed awake anyway! I crawled into my tent and went straight to sleep.

My alarm rudely buzzed at 5:10am and pulled me away from my slumbers. Still very sleepy, I put it on snooze and peeked out the tent. There is nothing like a pre-sunrise cloud inversion to wake you up! The motivation was now there and the ten minute snooze totally unnecessary. Although it was toasty in the tent I put on all my thermals, feeling a little ridiculous but there was no point shivering while they were in my bag. Breakfast was the last of my food, a *Turrón de Cacao* (chocolate rice bar). The tent was soon packed away and I was ready to go back to the summit for the sunrise. Ross and Ciara weren't quite as efficient at striking camp so I left them, not wanting to miss the spectacle.

The photos almost do justice to the beautiful sunrise. If it hadn't been for a meeting at 10:30am that morning I am sure we would have stayed longer. As it was, we enjoyed the sight for as long as we could before heading down the mountain. The only drawback of a cloud inversion is that you must walk through it and say good-bye to any reasonable sort of visibility. Ben Lomond eventually came into sight and we were back at the car before 9:00am. Ciara and I rushed to the office and were there with three minutes to spare, just in time management!



Posing on the trig-point.



Lovers on Ben Lomond.



A superb cloud inversion.

## *Beinn a' Ghlo – sneaking out on a Monday*

KRIS MOVED BACK TO SCOTLAND at the start of the month and was lucky to be given Monday as a bank holiday (it was not a Scottish one). One of his friends from his Caledonian University mountaineering days, Thomas, took the day off and I just didn't bother showing up at university! We originally planned to do the fearsome ridge walk Aonach Eagach but the mountain forecast predicted high winds and we didn't fancy our chances on such an exposed place. Instead, Kris picked me up early in the morning and we drove to Loch Moraig near Blair Atholl, where we met Thomas who had been waiting patiently. The path began with a gentle track that took us close to the base of Carn Liath which we started ascending after crossing a boggy section of ground.

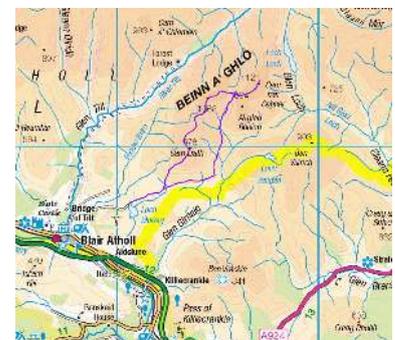


Unfortunately Thomas, who had told us he hadn't been well the previous evening, started to feel unwell again so he headed back down the mountain while he still had a chance to leave easily. Kris and I carried on to the summit and it was there that my remaining walking buddy realised his grievous mistake, he had forgotten to bring lunch! A white plastic bag containing his sandwiches, snacks and chocolate would be waiting for him when we got back to the car. Fortunately I had been generous with my food allowance so there was enough between us. A gentle-sided ridge named Beinn Mhaol took us to the next ascent Bràigh Coire Chruinn-bhalgain. At the top Kris ate my lunch before we set off for the final ascent of the day, Beinn a' Ghlo. I enjoyed the view from the top, hills in all directions with very little civilisation in sight. However, the scenery lacked the dramatic element I love so much. Perhaps it was because for weeks my hopes had been set on the mountains of Glen Coe. Still, it was a great day out and few Mondays come close!

Statistics	
Distance	22.08 km
Time	6h:52m
Average Speed	3.2 km/h
Elevation	1204 m
Min. Altitude	339 m
Max. Attitude	1114 m

The suggested time for the walk was 8-10 hours which I think is a bit of an overestimate.

Kris on Carn Liath pointing at Beinn a' Ghlo.



We were near Pitlochry and Blair Atholl.

9<sup>th</sup> October 2016

## Gyejok Mountain – retreading the Korean paths

FIVE YEARS AGO I SPENT the summer in Daejeon, South Korea doing an internship at the Korea Institute of Energy Research. During the weekends I often went hiking on the mountains, cold towel wrapped round my neck because of the humidity. Fast-forward to the present day and I once again find myself in Daejeon for a robotics conference, this time in Autumn when the local climate is pleasant shorts and t-shirt weather. It's not all work and no play in the academic world so I used some of my free time to climb one of my favourite mountains that surround Daejeon, Gyejok. It offers good views of the parts of the city I am familiar with, a mountain fortress and a red clay trail for barefoot walking.

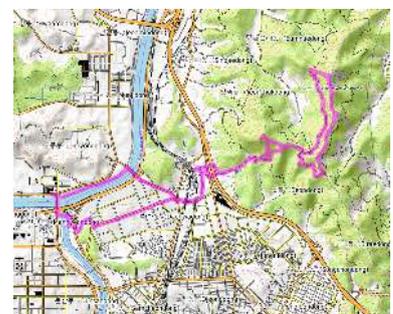
Statistics	
Distance	22.10 km
Time	5h:04m
Average Speed	2.7 km/h
Elevation	762 m
Min. Altitude	33 m
Max. Attitude	419 m

A mix between walking and running, well it was quite hot!



Not having access to a bike, my original plan involved running from the hotel where I was staying to the start. What I hadn't accounted for was the Korean breakfast. Western stomachs are not equipped to handle kimchi and rice at 7:30am, so the day began with a gentle walk before I got up to speed. I crossed the Yedeung Cheon river, passed some farmers working their fields, made it over the Gyeongbu Expressway to the base of the mountain. I was very glad to have my phone with GPS and a map pre-loaded for navigation. After following the maze of paths I got to the mountain fortress. Last time there was only me and one other couple but Koreans must be falling in love with their heritage because there lots of people this time. Equally busy was the actual summit of Gyejok mountain (just over 1 km away). This time I didn't spot any group that had hauled a large rice cooker to the top but there were some very lavish lunches. Perhaps the Koreans and the Scottish domingueros have more in common than first meets the eye!

The path along the river that leads to Gyejok.



It doesn't take long to leave the city.

## Loch Dochard – easing into winter

THE DOMINGUEROS FINALLY MANAGED to get back outdoors! Leaving Glasgow on Friday night, we headed north to our favourite camping spot near the Bridge of Orchy. David had bought a new tent—*The Cougar*—last month and Ross upgraded his car in August, so this was the first time they had slept in their respective purchases. Fortunately they both performed well, the temperatures were low with a layer of ice forming on the tents while we were sitting around the fire before bed.



A stag near our campsite crosses the river.



David and Ross at Loch Dochard.

river upstream to Loch Dochard. The path follows the river precariously close to the water and because it's not a big drop it's easy to lose attention and slip. We managed to avoid any unplanned swimming sessions but there were a few skids on the wet ground. It was also a path where waterproof boots that are actually impervious to water are necessary for a comfortable day because there was a river crossing and boggy sections along the track. Lunch was enjoyed at the shores of Loch Dochard and because all three domingueros were present, Margit had prepared flapjacks which I had my fair share of for dessert. Indeed, her generosity extended to preparing soup, fresh bread and crumble for us when we got back to Glasgow! A perfect ending to the first walk of the season.

Statistics	
Distance	14.02 km
Time	4h:40m
Average Speed	1.9 km/h
Elevation	111 m
Min. Altitude	173 m
Max. Attitude	234 m

The gentlest of walks.

The predicted snow fell during the night but it was only a light shower. However, in the morning the surrounding mountains were covered in cloud so we opted for our low level walk. From the car park near Victoria Bridge we followed the Abhainn Shira



Following the river.

27<sup>th</sup> November 2016

## *Doune Castle – celebrating St. Andrew's Day*

THE FREE ENTRY TO A CASTLE in Scotland was on again to celebrate St. Andrew's day. This year we chose Doune Castle, situated between Stirling and Callander. It has been used as a filming location for a lot of TV shows and films, most famously *Outlander* and *Monty Python and The Holy Grail*. Technically it is classed as a ruin but visitors can still go inside and explore the various rooms. Perhaps the best part were the superb audio guides that provided information as we walked round. Narrated by Monty Python's Terry Jones it was well-scripted and informative, although it did have the side effect of us not talking much during our explorations.



Silly jumping.



Unfortunately parts of the castle were shut for repair so we didn't get to see everything. Generally the stonework looks to be in reasonably good condition but I think some masonry had fallen down recently so it wasn't possible to walk round the battlements, which we all wanted to do. On the way back to Glasgow we stopped off at Dobbie's Gardening Centre, where it took about fifteen minutes to find a parking space. The Christmas rush has well and truly begun. David and Margit provided dinner, which was an excellent chocolate fondue and apple pie. After dinner we even managed to get a few rounds of 'No Thanks' for the first time this year.

Doune Castle entrance.



At the back of the castle.

## Dumgoyne – final run of the year

DECEMBER IS ALWAYS A BUSY time of year but Ross and I managed to squeeze in a trip to Dumgoyne. Before we started the run we took the quadrotor out for a spin. I have been working on it since last time and it's flying better, Ross even managed some FPV flight! By the time we put out running gear on the sun was already preparing to set in the sky; daylight hours are few and far between in a Scottish winter. Conveniently, neither of us had remembered to bring a torch so we had a good excuse to only do a short run.

Statistics	
Distance	3.9 km
Time	0h:43m
Average Speed	3.7 km/h
Elevation	369 m
Min. Altitude	32 m
Max. Attitude	400 m

Slow going up.



Squint Dumgoyne selfie.



Ross's fancy water bottle holding solution.

This time last year we did Dumgoyne, Garloch Hill and Earl's seat, still one of three is better than zero of three. Running up Dumgoyne would require almost superhuman fitness, a power-walk to the top is the best we can manage. I got to the top first (important details like this are crucial) and put on my new down jacket. Strictly speaking, it was supposed to be for Christmas but an opportunity like this to test it was not be missed. It performed admirably during the long wait for Ross to show face... I jest, he was right behind me. The descent was exhilarating as always, and the ground was not too slippery. We soon reached the bottom and wrapped up another year's excursions, bring on 2017!



Up and down Dumgoyne.