Fraochaidh - 11/11/12 A hidden gem, finding the paps missing pap, and wilderness in glencoe…..

This weekend’s entertainment was meant to be kayaking with a guide booked from Ballachulish. Unfortunately my arm had still not mended properly so kayaking was out of the question. However progess has been made, albeit slower than I would like. So I decided to head to Ballachulish, not to kayak but for a walk and to come back down and meet the kayakers after the course.

I had initially thought on doing a short walk up Garbh Bheinn, meaning a long lye and late start. However the forecast had improved late on the Saturday and I decided on Fraochaidh. I had investigated the route from Duror but decided to start and leave from Ballachulish. Although longer, the route from here seemed less steep and mainly on paths. My arm was not fully healed and I did not fancy any unwelcome slips which may prolong the recovery plus I was on my own and wanted to take the safest option!!! So alarm was set for 05.50 and the plan was to get to Ballachulish by 08.00am. However I woke at 04.00 and felt awake so got up and left. It was a cold, frosty starry morning and the windscreen was frozen, not too sure the neighbours appreciated the running car at 04.30 on the Sunday morning ☹

Anyway made it to Ballachulish for 06.45 and off I went. It was not completely dark and there was just enough light and the head torch stayed in the bag.

The walk past Sgorr Dhearg was lovely with its top being coated in snow, however the chances of yet another stunning sunrise were diminished by low cloud over the Glencoe hills to the East – suppose you can’t win them all. The treck up to Mam Uchdiach was a little rough and I did have to get the poles out (for the first time since hurting arm) for crossing the River Laroch. I tried once and retreated to get poles out, and thought my boots were going to be filled with cold water. Poles out and across I went to find the extremely boggy path up to the Man Uchdaich. Watch you don’t loose a boot heading up here (gaiters recommended)!!!!!!!

Looking back and Sgorr a Choise looks impressive and rocky. In fact it mirrors the Pap of Glencoe which sits in the distance, perhaps this is the paps other half!!!!! Certainly looks like it from this ridge!!

I was taking my time sauntering up the hill and taking pictures (and videos). The views all around were great and the snow capped peaks added to it. Many famous hills were in view, but from an unfamiliar angle. It was nice seeing these hills from a different angle:

* Closest and taking up all of the north ward views were the back side of the Ballachulish horse shoe- Sgorr Dhearg and Sgorr Dhonuill with their white caps on
* Further north and east there was a thicker white covering over Stob ban and the Aonachs.
* East and Bidean in Glencoe was looking awesome if not a little unfamiliar from this angle
* A little further round and Sgor na h – Ulaidh and it neighbouring munro were looking inviting
* A shapely peak from the north and Starav was recognised – a great looking peak from this direction too.
* A little nearer lay the large bulk of Beinn Sgulaird

Many of these hills hide away from the road but this hill gave a great platform to see them as well as a new outlook on some familiar friends!!!

These “familiar munro friends” have given me many great days in these hills but none have required the walk in that Fraochaidh demanded!! The long walk to reach the summit and then the “ups and downs” of the ridge gave this outing a feeling of isolation. I really felt in a wilderness here that I have never felt in this part of the country before.

Not too sure if it was the lack of exercise in the last 5 weeks or the onset of a cold, but I was feeling tired (I also had the ice axe and crampons in the bag adding weight??). The ridge was wonderful with the above views stretching the eye as well as the view to the isles opening up the further west I travelled. However it had many ups and downs and I was feeling knackered by the time I came to the final ascent to the top!! I paused for 5 minutes gathering my energy and then headed up, not going to fast and taking my time. Through the snow line and onto the summit ridge where the shallow snow was nice and crispy – however not enough need for crampons though. I made the top at 11.30 – 4.5hrs after starting!! I did not think it would have taken so long. There was an icy wind catching the top of the hill and I could see the weather was turning as the grey cloud lowered out to the west obscuring my view of the Rum and Mull which had previously been present.

Not wanting to get caught out I decided to head around and descend to get a nice spot to eat lunch. It was a long plod back to Ballachullish but I was glad to have found this great little gem of a hill, one giving awesome views!!

Got back to the car for 14.00 – it had taken 7hrs – I was not rushing (and video and photos take time!!) – however I was glad I had made the extra early start otherwise it may have been a walk out in the dark !! A note to point out if thinking of doing this hill in mid winter !!!!

However a worthy outing for a Corbett in a country surrounded by more famous mountains.