



MAY 2023

HEATHERY HEIGHTS MONTHLY

Articles, walks and news



NEXT ISSUE

*Glenan Woods &
Eilean na Beithe*

BEINN GHLAS: 'THE GREY GREEN MOUNTAIN'

A shy Argyll Marilyn...

This Argyll Marilyn rises straight from the shores of Loch Fyne, its bulk seen when driving through Minard and Crarae, yet its summit is illusive, set back atop the grassy damp slopes of a hillside more trodden by deer than man. Not easy to gain access to from the main road, due to deer fencing and forestry, it is easier to tackle from its western slopes and best on a clear day to make the most of the views. A dry spell is recommended to ensure that the ground is not too wet as the hillside is generally grassy mounds interspersed with bog myrtle, sphagnum moss, occasional heather and bracken with little tree cover.

Below Beinn Ghlas the small lochside village of Minard was once part of the estate of Minard Castle, which lies just to the south on a small promontory on Loch Fyne.

Originally called Knockbuie House the original structure of the castle was built in the 18th Century by the Campbells. Thereafter numerous additions to the house were added to create the current castle alongside several changes of ownership. The Askew family commissioned the Glasgow architect JT Rohead for its castellated design in the mid-19th Century. Previous owners also include Sir John Pender (the founder of Cable and Wireless), the Lloyd family and the Forestry Commission (Canmore [ID 85174](#)) Despite the castle's size it is tricky to see from the road although a glimpse of it can be espied from the summit slopes of Beinn Ghlas.

Prior to this humankind had already made their mark and several prehistoric remains are dotted across the hillside and near the shore including cup and ring marks, standing stones, a chambered cairn and fort. Old shielings and homesteads also abound including the remains of Feorlin, which one passes if going over to Carron Bothy or Loch Awe.

The area is also associated with a rather unusual disaster which took place in 1886. It was then commonplace for passengers on paddle steamers to be entertained and one such planned entertainment on this occasion was to see the effects of quarry blasting. Crarae quarry was the largest granite quarry in Scotland at the time and so to see a huge blast would have been quite something. Sadly, not all went to plan. Passengers were dropped off by the Lord of the Isles after the explosion had taken place to see the effects of the blast close at hand before continuing its cruise up Loch Fyne, expecting to pick up those visiting the quarry on its return. What they did not know was that the quarry would now be devoid of oxygen and filled with poisonous gases. As people collapsed many did eventually make their escape or were rescued as the air cleared but meanwhile a number did not, and several men died. What had started as an exciting day out turned into a disaster with the paddle steamer returning to a dreadful scene. More on the history of this disaster can be found through Auchindrain Museum (auchindrain.org.uk).

The walk up Beinn Ghlas starts at the south end of the village from the small car park by the village hall.



The walk

1. Turn left out of the car park and walk north, crossing to walk on the pavement by Loch Fyne. You will pass the corrugated iron building of Lochfyneside Parish Church built in 1910, the primary school (sadly currently mothballed) and the large old post office building, slightly set back from the road, on your left. Continue past the bus stops until you reach the end of the pavement on the seaward side (this is nearly 700m north of the car park) and carefully cross. Continue north for 100m until you reach the end of the line of bungalows and a dirt track going left.
2. Turn left up the track continuing for just over 1km. You will pass several houses and small offshoots before eventually entering forestry and reaching a junction.
3. Continue straight ahead on the main track up the hill towards Strone and Garvachy Farms. Passing a faint old track on your right continue through the gate leaving the forestry and, ignoring a sharp turn left to the farms, bear right on the main track ahead.
4. From the junction continue for another 1.25km, passing through a double gate, keeping to the valley track up towards Crarae reservoir. You will need to ignore the track on the left to the substation and huge new pylon track which also veers off to the left and stay on the smaller track that veers right to follow the Allt Mealach to Gallanach. This will take you through another gate.
5. Just before the house at Gallanach (and to avoid disturbance) it is best to drop east down the south side of the small burn before hopping over and crossing the Allt Mealach near the old shielings. The footbridges are no longer there but there are a few narrow spots that are easy enough to cross unless there has been very heavy rain.
6. It is now a case of finding a good line up, heading ESE, between the two small burns towards Creag nan Gabhar, zigzagging upwards through the scrub and boggier ground. Fortunately, the slopes here are generally bracken free so it is more a case of slow but steady.

Safety in the Outdoors

Please exercise responsibly and use appropriate clothing and equipment for your chosen outdoor activity. Inform a contact about your route/whereabouts and don't forget your phone, snacks, drink, medication and first aid supplies. Check the forecast and [mountain weather conditions](#). Please keep your dog under close control, especially around livestock and wildlife, and be aware some open areas of moorland may have snares in use. Please follow the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#), bylaws and laws that protect areas including National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

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6.cont. Deer tracks occasionally help lead you in the right direction and frogs love this kind of ground so you might spot the odd 'froglet' hopping out of your way!

7. As you near Creag nan Gabhar you can contour NE along its western flank then continue NE for some 300m over grassy mounds to the Trig point. It is worth wandering east from the summit for views along Loch Fyne. The hill offers an excellent panorama towards Ben Cruachan, Beinn Bhuidhe, the Paps of Jura and the Arrochar Alps.

8. To return you can walk over to the western side of the summit plateau before heading south until you meet your route up from the sheilings and over to Gallanach. It is best to return this way as it reduces the amount of boggy ground to cross (a line to the reservoir just adds to the bogginess!).

9. Return the way you came from Gallanach.

If you have time, you can also cross over the main road opposite the primary school just before the traffic lights, go south along the shore and walk the short, albeit muddy, woodland circuit that follows the Brainport Heritage Trail passing the old quern quarry, mill ruins and a series of standing stones. Allow an extra hour.

Note: alternative routes up Beinn Ghlas from Crarae gardens and the quarry generally mean the need to cross deer fencing, more bracken, steeper slopes above and, if going via the gardens, require an entry fee/permission.

Walk Information

Route: Beinn Ghlas (Marilyn)

Distance: 12.2km (7.5 miles)

Ascent: 497m

Time: 4 - 4½ hrs

Terrain: Paved; forestry and farm tracks; open hillside, boggy and uneven.

Map/s: OS Landranger 55 (1:50 000)

OS Explorer 360 (1:25 000)

Start/Finish/Parking: Minard Village Hall

Grid reference: NR 976 960

Public Transport: Bus, 428 and 926

Toilets: No

[OS Map Link](#)

