

WALKING LOCH LOMOND AND THE TROSSACHS



About the Author

Ronald Turnbull is seen here in the eye of the Argyll Needle, just below the summit of the Cobbler. Among his experiences in the Lomond and Trossachs he includes a bivvy-bag night at the summit of Ben Ledi when he woke up covered in sleet, and a crossing of all eight of the Luss Hills in one November day. Researching this book he has enjoyed in particular revisiting those intricate Crianlarich Hills, and the area's two big views, from Ben A'an and from the Dumpling (alias Duncryne).

He has won awards for his writing – the Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild Award for excellence nine times, in four different categories; and also for his walking – the Fell Running Association's Long-distance Trophy for a journey over all the 2000ft hills of southern Scotland. He is based in Dumfriesshire.

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Photo by Matt Scase

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by Ronald Turnbull

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Front cover: Heading down from the Cobbler summit towards North Peak, with Beinn Narnain beyond (Route 64)

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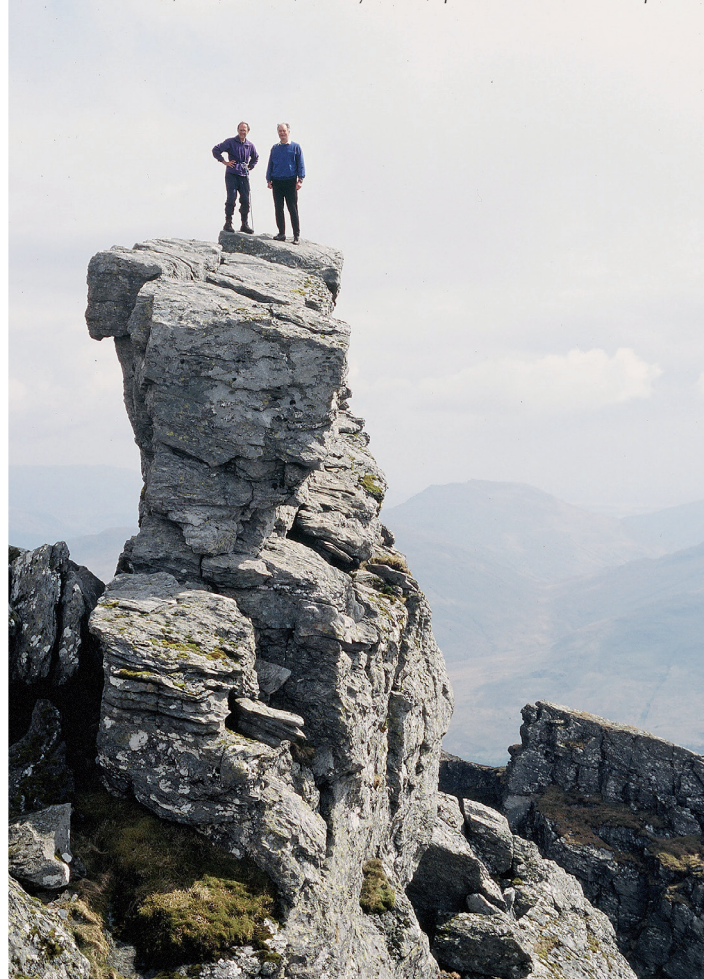
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Mountain Warning

Mountain walking can be a dangerous activity carrying a risk of personal injury or death. It should be undertaken only by those with a full understanding of the risks and with the training and experience to evaluate them. While every care and effort has been taken in the preparation of this guide, the user should be aware that conditions can be highly variable and can change quickly, materially affecting the seriousness of a mountain walk. Therefore, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, neither Cicerone nor the author accept liability for damage of any nature (including damage to property, personal injury or death) arising directly or indirectly from the information in this book.

To call out the Mountain Rescue, ring 999 or the international emergency number 112: this will connect you via any available network. Once connected to the emergency operator, ask for the police.

The Cobbler, at only 884m, is still mainland Scotland's toughest summit, reached by an exposed Grade 2 scramble (Route 61). The mica schist is uncomfortably smooth, especially when damp. The left-hand walker here has preferred a roped ascent. Having reached the summit, both are now (in theory at least) qualified to lead Clan Campbell





Map Key

	ground above 1050m/3500ft
	ground above 900m/3000ft
	ground above 750m/2500ft
	ground above 600m/2000ft
	ground above 450m/1500ft
	ground above 300m/1000ft
	ground above 150m/500ft
	ground below 150m/500ft

Contour intervals chosen to feature the Munro and Corbett levels at 3000ft and 2500ft.

	a Munro
	other summit of interest: on overview maps, a Corbett
	parking (typically at walk start)
	building
	bothy
	castle
	loch
	river, stream

	motorway
	major road
	minor road
	unsurfaced track
	railway
	route
	variant or adjacent route

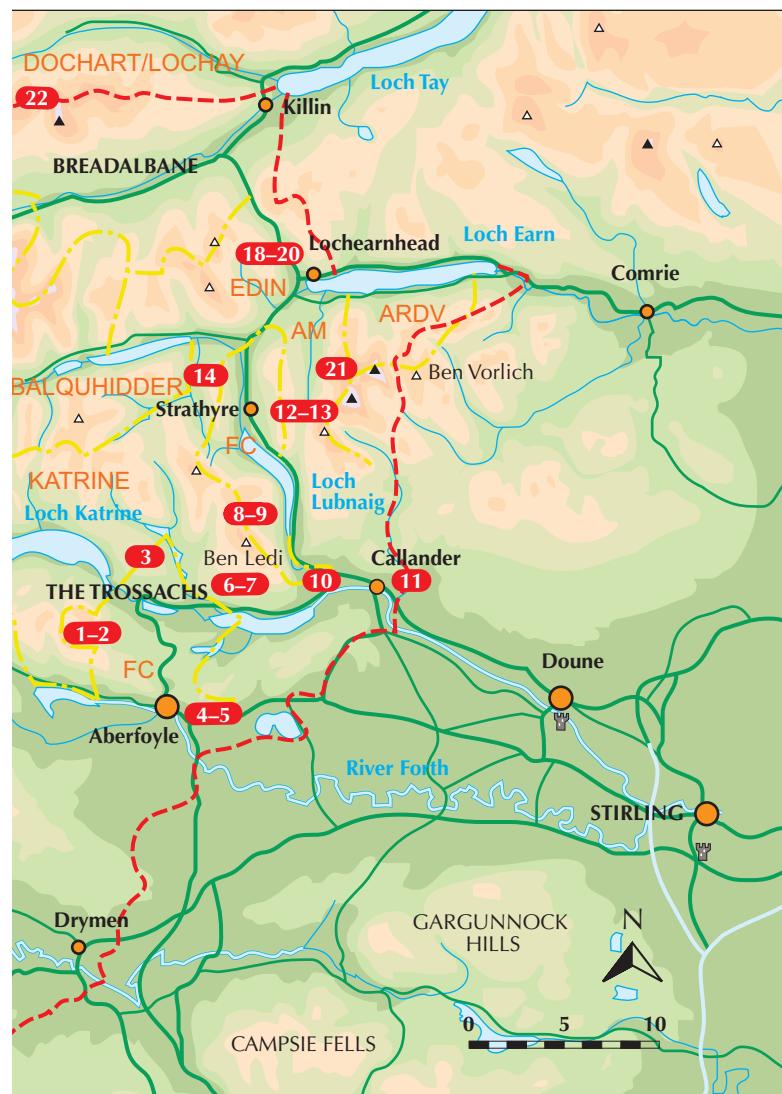
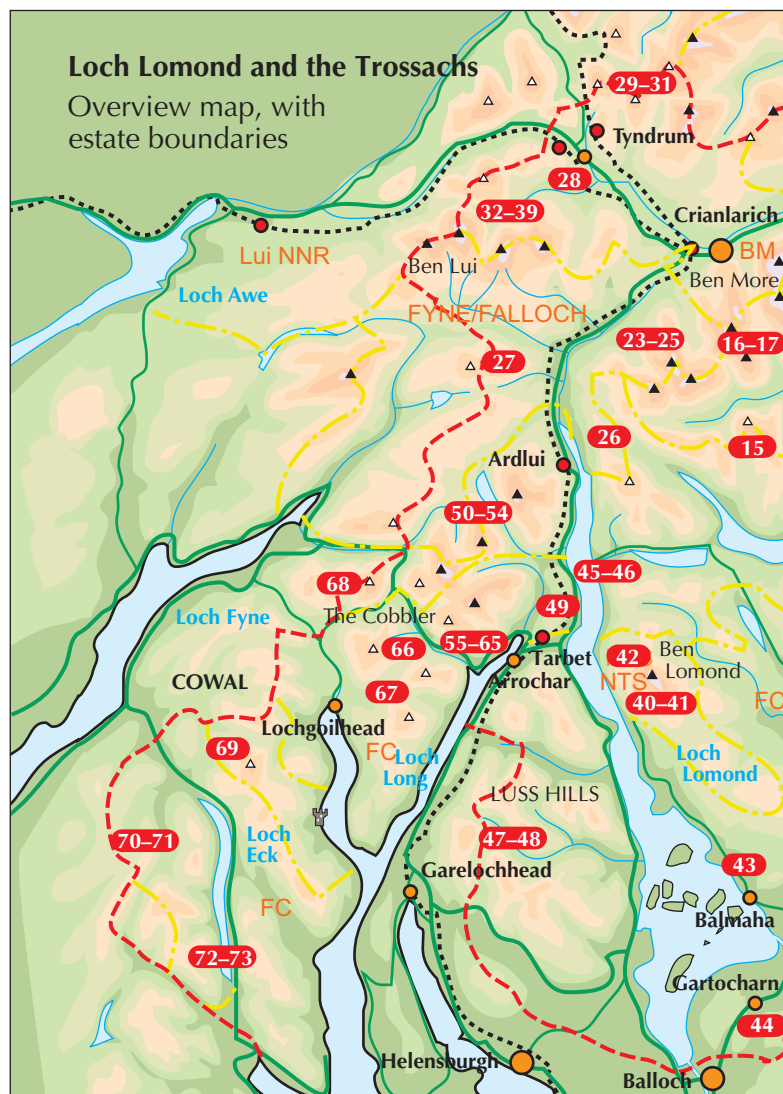
Overview map (pages 12–13)

	estate boundaries (see Appendix B)
	estates (see Appendix B for full names)
	National Park boundary
	route location
	town, village

Route symbols on OS map extracts

	route 1
	route 2
	routes follow same path
	variant
	linking routes
	start point
	finish point
	start/finish point
	direction of walk

For OS symbols key see OS maps.



Heading up the Cobbler's east corrie (Route 57) with the South Top (the 'Cobbler's Wife') overhead



INTRODUCTION

THE HIGH ROAD AND THE LOW

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs are the beginning of the big hills of the Scottish Highlands. And given that they stand in the front doorway, it's only right that they are the friendly and welcoming ones. Instead of huge crags and airy, scary ridges, here are small paths that weave uphill among boulders and little lumpy outcrops. The Munros (3000ft or 914m mountains) are not easy anywhere, but here in the south they are that little bit less serious.

So it makes sense that these hills, first in geography for those approaching from the cities of the south, are also, for many Scottish hill-goers, first in time. The Munro tick-list will often start off on the most southerly of them all, Ben Lomond. Rowardennan car park is large, and has a handy shelter hut. Ben Lomond's path is as wide, and as well used, as a town shopping street – but a lot more sociable and friendly. Chaps with chainsaws have cleared the gloomy spruce from the lower slopes, so straight away you see the spreading waters of Loch Lomond and feel the cool mountain air. The path will offer views of the much-sung loch all the way up – at least, until the cloud closes in. And across the otherwise gentle slope runs one small crag, as a first footfall on the crinkly grey mountain rock. It's the schist of the southern Highlands, wrinkled like

the hide of an elderly rhinoceros, and like that rhinoceros friendly on the whole but with the occasional nasty moment. Unlike the rhino, the grey schist breaks down into a fertile soil that gives lots of grass, a sprinkling of tormentil and bedstraw, and in special lime-rich corners the tiny gardens of alpine rarities.

Nobody, we suppose, would clamber over a rhino, however elderly. And the schist, slippery when wet and well endowed with wild flowers and other green shaggy matter, tends also to form knobs and excrescences rather than high crags. It is not great for scrambling or climbs – the Cobbler, with its fine routes and rock-tower top, is an atypical oddity. Otherwise there's a loose ridgeline on Ben Lui, some scrappy crag on Beinn a' Chroin, and small unserious scrambling moments almost anywhere.

But the walker attempting that first-ever Munro is probably quite pleased about the lack of scrambling on Ben Lomond. As you emerge at the kissing gate onto the open hill, the loch spreads ever wider, with islands casually flung about in it by a preoccupied glacier. One of the little ferryboats chugs along the shoreline, its passengers well waterproofed and hunched under the drizzle. Or it's a different day and they're wondering why the sunshine isn't also warm, as



Length



Difficulty



1 Ben Venue (shorter)

Start/finish	Ben Venue car park, Loch Achray NN 505 067
Distance	11.5km/7 miles
Ascent	700m/2300ft
Approx time	4½hr
Max altitude	Ben Venue 729m
Terrain	Smooth paths to forest top, then pathless hill and rough path
Map	LR 57; Expl 365; Harvey Ben Venue

Ben Venue is from Gaelic *A' Bheinn Mheanbh*, meaning 'tiny mountain'. (*Meanbh* is also Gaelic for midge, as 'very tiny fly' *meanbh-chuileag*.) The name fits. Venue is small but surprisingly rocky, and is the second most popular hillwalk in this area (personally I prefer it to Ben Lomond, the area's Number One). The straightforward up and down by Gleann Riabhach is good in itself. The upper glen is spectacular, so that if you use the South Ridge ascent, and the Gleann Riabhach path just for the descent, you do miss out a little.

However, Ben Venue does call for a detailed exploration, so an unfrequented ridgeline is here offered for the ascent. Route 2 gives the wider Ben Venue some more of the attention it deserves.

The former start for Ben Venue was along the road to Loch Achray Hotel and up forest tracks behind it. But the Forestry Commission has created a tarmac-free and much nicer route. The twists and turns of this are complicated, but are marked with big wooden signposts.

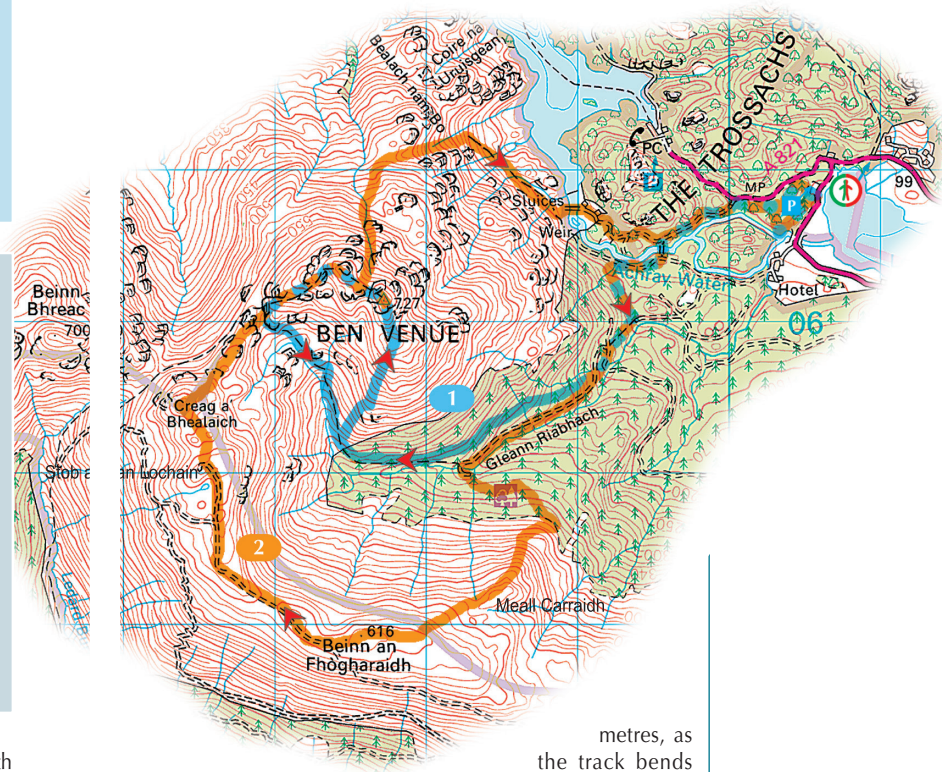
Or else follow the right-hand path and then turn right.

From the back of the car park, **start** by the left-hand path for 400 metres to a junction where you turn left. ◀

The path, with a blue/green marker, heads downhill towards Ben Venue and crosses duckboard to a road junction. Take the lane to the left ('Private Road') for 600 metres, when a path on the left leads across a charming footbridge and up to a forest track. Turn right (signposted

for Ben Venue) and after 200 metres turn left up a wide path.

The path rises between tall trees, to the top end of a forest track. Turn up right here, on a well-built path, running up to join another forest road. Turn left, and in 300



metres, as the track bends left towards a bridge, turn up right, again on good path. It emerges to a clear-felled area and a final forest road.

Cross the forest road and continue ahead on the good path, through second growth woodland of self-sown spruce and birch. After 500 metres the path passes



Crianlarich hills and Loch Katrine, from the summit ridge of Ben Venue

into a recently clear felled area; it crosses a small track, which could be taken down left to join the 'final forest road' not far below – a last chance to switch into Route 2.

A tall fence now runs above the well-made path. As the path rounds the spur and turns north into the upper corrie, the fence turns away uphill. Continue by the main path (and eventual descent route) ahead, or else by the untrodden ridge up on your right.

• Gleann Riabhach path

The path, handsomely reconstructed in 2017, runs up the corrie ahead to a sprawling cairn in a **col at 580m**. Here turn right on a path that's initially steep and loose but then gets nicer. Just as the path dips into a small col, look out for a side-path turning left, for only this takes you to the actual summit. It winds up among the rocks of the crest to the **summit cairn** at 729m (NN 474 062). In the next col, the bypass path rejoins, and climbs steeply with a crag above it to the **trig point** at 727m (NN 477 061). The trig point is in ruins, probably struck by lightning – however it's an even better viewpoint than the true summit.

• South ridge

Having emerged from the woodland and clear fell, once past the constraining fence turn back up right onto the

ridgeline above. Thus you bypass the very bottom of the ridge, which is a vertical outcrop. Head up the ridgeline: a short rise on steep grass and then hummocky. There's a path for the final rise to the ruined **trig point** at 727m.

Descent by Gleann Riabhach path

From Ben Venue's ruined **trig point** (727m), take the worn path that runs down below a crag to the first col. Now keep up right for the true summit (729m) or take the bypass path contouring round to the left. Follow the rejoined path down into a **col (580m)** with a sprawling cairn. The path continuing up ahead goes to Kinlochard, so turn down left into the corrie, on the well-built new path. It runs down the rocky little valley and through clear fell into the woodland.

All the descent turnings apart from the second one are clearly signposted – after crossing a first forest road and turning left on a lower one, it's the path down right, between two boulders, that lacks a marker.

Having descended to the forest road top, you could instead of turning left (signed 'car park') continue directly downhill past **Loch Achray Hotel**: slightly shorter, and an easier finish by starlight. Otherwise, follow the signposts to return via the charming footbridge. At the final path junction, take whichever path you didn't use on the outward walk for the last 400 metres to the car park. ►

For those with two cars or a chauffeur, from Achray to Kinlochard via Ben Venue is a popular crossing.

Path repair team descending the hill path to Ben Venue

