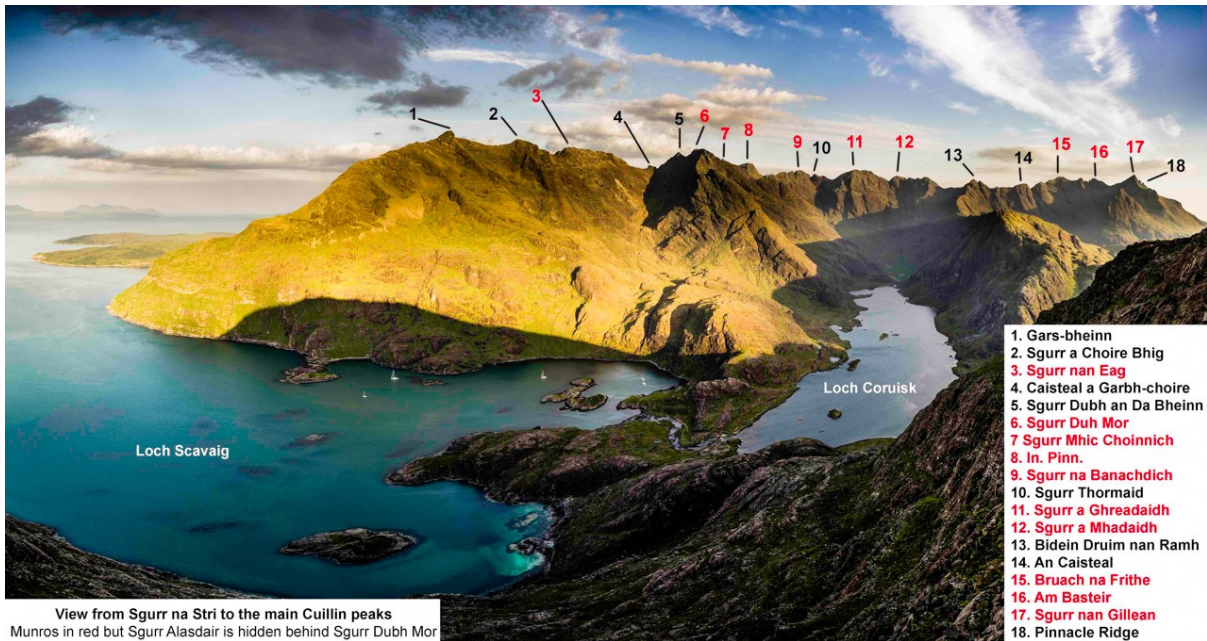


The Cuillin Munros



The Cuillin Munros are in a league of their own. Complex terrain and navigation, sustained scrambling, rock climbing and abseiling make them stand out from their mainland brethren. They do have a bit of a reputation hence why many Munroists leave them to last and many choose to use a guide.



Pre sunrise view to Sgurr nan Gillean (right), Am Bastier and the Bhashtier Tooth (centre) and Bruach na Frithe (left) in clouds

The Cuillin is a magical mountain environment of jagged Black Cuillin Peaks rising from the sea. It is a beautiful yet tough challenge and, hopefully, this document can help people achieve some of their dreams.

There are twelve Munros; 11 on (or just off) the main Cuillin Ridge and the outlying Bla Bheinn. Start off with the easier ones and see how things go. The first three are all walks but the navigation can be confusing in poor visibility. Consensus may vary but the list below is basically in ascending order of difficulty.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Sgurr na Banachdich | Walk |
| 2. Bla Bheinn | Walk |
| 3. Bruach na Frithe | Walk |
| 4. Sgurr nan Eag | Grade 1 scramble |
| 5. Sgurr Alasdair | Grade 2 scramble |
| 6. Sgurr a Mhadaidh | Grade 2/3 scramble |
| 7. Sgurr a Ghreadaidh | Grade 3 scramble |
| 8. Sgurr Dubh Mor | Grade 2 scramble |
| 9. Sgurr Mhic Choinnich | Grade 2 scramble |
| 10. Sgurr nan Gillean | Grade 3 scramble |
| 11. Am Basteir | Difficult rock climb (but, "The Bad Step" can be bypassed) |
| 12. The In Pinn | Moderate rock climb and an abseil |

NB the grades above are usually via the easiest routes. However when combining Munros then harder alternatives might have to be taken. Thus the south east ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean is a grade 3 scramble but if done in conjunction with Am Bastier will involve ascending and possibly descending the west ridge usually by Tooth Groove and Arete, a Moderate rock climb which can also be abseiled

I have put Sgurr Dubh Mor above Sgurr a Ghreadaidh and Mhadaidh because the difficulties to these latter are restricted to the exit and return to An Dorus which is only a couple of awkward moves and easily protected by a rope. Conversely, Sgurr Dubh Mor is more remote and a challenge to find the way out to it then the easiest line to the summit especially in less than perfect weather/visibility.

Similarly, I've put Sgurr Mhic Choinnich higher up the list than Sgurr a Mhadaidh and Sgurr a Ghreadaidh despite having a slightly easier grade. To my mind, Sgurr Mhic Choinnich is more sustained and exposed despite not having the harder couple of moves of the two requiring an exit from An Dorus.

Am Basteir has awkward climbing down The Bad Step, hence the grade, but this can be either avoided or can be descended by abseil or you can even just be lowered down it. The In Pinn gets top spot since the climbing is unavoidable and very exposed.

Bla Bheinn, Bruach na Frithe and Sgurr na Banachdich are basically just rough walking so as long as you are confident in your navigation and the weather is good then these would be good to start with.



Sgurr na Banachdich, one of the easiest Cuillin Munros

Twelve Munros of varying difficulty and with a huge reputation for difficulty and exposure but within the means of many walkers. I have done them with people who have never climbed or abseiled, with unfit people, with scared people, with those convinced success here is impossible.

The secret is to stack the odds in your favour;

1. Weather and conditions

This can make a huge difference. Good weather has a feel good factor but also means dry, non slippery rock, more straight forward navigation, no being buffeted by high winds.

Best weather forecast; Met Office Mountain Weather forecast for North West Highlands where you can select individual Munros.

2. Friends and Partners

If possible go with someone with personal experience of the Cuillin thus you'll be taken on the easiest possible route. Someone with lots of experience will be able to offer confidence and the security of a rope where needed.

3. Start Easy

Nothing puts people off more than failure and/or fear. Don't stumble at the first hurdle so choose an appropriate Munro first. A little success soon builds confidence as you get used to the terrain, the rock and the exposure.

4. Bite Sized Chunks

Break the Munros down into days that are easily achievable by you. Sure, the whole ridge has been done in a few hours but in this case it's definitely going to be a case of more haste, less speed. Long, tiring, scary days aren't going to boost your confidence. Perhaps start with just single Munros rather than linking things up. Gradually build your confidence and experience.

5. The Enjoyment Factor

Remember this is meant to be fun, not a battleground. Take frequent breaks, chill out, stay hydrated and energized.

6. The Right Gear

The Cuillin isn't a place to be trying out new gear so break things in, especially footwear prior to your arrival. Things need to be right for the job and comfortable. I'm a big fan of approach shoes rather than big walking boots and personally find them much more comfortable in the right conditions. I hardly ever leave home without walking poles and find they make a huge difference. Not only reducing wear and tear on knees and ankles but helping with balance, river crossings and more. Gloves may be useful given the notoriously rough gabbro rock.

7. Local Knowledge

Research things as much as possible. There are numerous FB groups, books and magazines as well as videos on Youtube. Little things can make a big difference. Places where you can dump pack and poles to lighten the load before picking off a peak. Water sources such as the perma spring below the TD Gap reduce the requirement to carry burdensome quantities of water.



Bruach na Frithe, another of the easier Cuillin Munros



High on the Inaccessible Pinnacle with Bla Bheinn in the distance

Courses

We offer the traditional 4 day Munro course which are ideal for fit people and those with limited time available and also increasingly popular 6 day courses. The latter allow for a slightly more relaxed approach with some scope to allow for bad weather, possibly a mid week rest day or the chance to tackle the outlying Munro, Bla Bheinn.

Costs are £485 for 4 days and £650 for 6 days with a maximum of 3 people on each course.

If Munroists want then we can organize a celebratory dinner for the team on the final evening and this is usually at Munros Bar at The Taigh Ailean Hotel at Portnalong.

After safety, ensuring everyone enjoys themselves is my number one priority so we'll aim to meet up the evening before the first day of the course. Not only can people get to know each other but questions can be asked, gear sorted and plans made for the week. Typically this meeting will be at our house in Glen Brittle close to the start point for a lot of the Munros. Most importantly, we'll check people's gear and fit harnesses and helmets. We can provide any technical gear so you just need normal hill walking kit, food and water. It's good to iron out any problems and particularly to ensure people are happy with the fitting of harnesses and helmets and know how the days ahead will work.

After a drink and a chat, we can check the forecast, plan the next day and arrange a time and place for everyone to meet. Our house in Glen Brittle provides a good base to start and finish many of the Cuillin Munros. We can offer safe parking and tea/coffee and cakes at the end of the day.

We can make recommendations to people for accommodation ranging from local hotels to hostels, bunkhouses and campsites.

Cakes

I guess, it's almost a law, but most climbers and hill walkers love their cakes and Bridgette will be providing a variety of tasty hill snacks to supplement people's packed lunches. Typically, one day it might be Cuillin Cookies, another day Brittle Bakes (flapjacks). Since you can never have too many cakes and with the hill days and calories burnt nobody need worry about putting on weight so everyone is encouraged to take it in turns to bring cakes for the group, be they home made or bought. Obviously there are variations possible on this theme and I know one group this year plans to sample a different single malt on each Munro.

Many Munroists leave the Cuillin Munros to last either due to their reputation or a desire to get the most experience they can prior to tackling them. It's fair to say that the Cuillin Munros have a fearsome reputation. In many ways they are in a league of their own. The Inaccessible Pinnacle requires climbing and abseiling, not the usual skills in the repertoire of the average hillwalker. The walk ins may be short by some Munro standards but they all start at close to sea level so there are big ascents/descents. Also, much of the terrain is fairly technical with lots of hands on scrambling. The navigation can be complex especially in sub optimal conditions. Make no mistake, the Cuillin Munros are a challenge but don't be over awed. Do your research, make some plans, try to get a bit of a gentler introduction with some of the easier ones like Sgurr na Banachdich or Bruach na Frithe. Perhaps go with a friend who has prior knowledge of the area and scrambling/climbing skills. Get used to the rock, it's different types being principally gabbro and basalt. Gabbro is super grippy and very abrasive and can play hell with your footwear and wear out your finger tips so consider taking gloves with you. Basalt forms

dykes or intrusions through the gabbro often making natural staircases. If wet then basalt can be treacherously slippery for example the upper part of Sgurr Mhic Choinnich.



Sgurr nan Gillean with view to Bla Bheinn



The final moves on to the summit of Sgurr nan Gillean

Once you've done a few of the easier ones, you'll get a bit of a feel for the landscape, the geology and how your capabilities and psyche fit the challenge. Slightly more challenging is **Sgurr nan Eag** but it's still basically just a walk with no horrendous exposure or drops so a good next target. It's often combined with **Sgurr Dubh Mor** but this definitely gets into more exposed and scrambling terrain. Also the easiest route isn't that straight forward and can be a real challenge in less than good visibility.

Sgurr Alasdair is traditionally added on to these two and this makes for a quality day but very long. Sgurr Alasdair would be ascended by its south west flank, a steep scramble with an awkward chimney start then exposure as you get higher. Easier is to save Sgurr Alasdair for another day and approach it from Coire Lagan via the Great Stone Chute. This is certainly hardwork and must be ascended and descended but isn't exposed or requiring technical scrambling. The ridge to the summit from the top of the Chute is exposed but the scrambling is on good rock with good holds.

Sgurr a Mhadaidh and **Sgurr a Ghreadaidh** are usually done together and accessed by screes leading up to An Dorus. The exit from this and the return to this are the cruxes of both Munros. The difficulties are very short lived and the rest of the scrambling is much easier.

Sgurr Dubh Mor is a long walk but if the easiest line is taken the scrambling up to its summit is not too bad. A series of short steps are linked by ledges but it can be very confusing terrain if the weather closes in.

Sgurr Mhic Choinnich is another slog, this time up the An Stac Screes then lots of scrambling up short rocky steps to the summit slabs. These can be treacherous in the wet so a good one to save for fine weather. It is a serious mountain with a lot of exposure on both sides of the ridge, lots of scrambling.

Am Basteir is mainly grade 2 scrambling but in a very exposed position. Then there is The Bad Step, a technical rock climb which has to be descended. However, don't fear it too much since although it's in an exposed position it's only a few metres high. Also the climbing can be avoided either by abseil or you can be lowered down. Alternatively, there is a bypass but that misses the best bit of the route....but it's there, if necessary.

The In Pinn is more of a psychological than physical challenge for most people. It would be foolish to pretend that it isn't in a steep, exposed position. However, I have done this with people who have never climbed or abseiled before. Most of the climbing is on big foot and handholds. The crux is a few metres where the route steepens and the holds aren't as positive as you might wish. That's the bad news. The good news is that the person who climbed the route (the leader) will be belayed (fixed securely to the rock) just above you. This has a number of advantages. The rope will be in a straight line from you to them so they can physically assist you by keeping the rope very tight. They can also see what you are doing and offer helpful advice. The second half of the climbing, above where your leader belayed, is exposed since you are right on the ridge now but the actual climbing is much easier.

Once on the top the descent is either by abseil or your leader can lower you down if you don't feel up to it. Usually for clients, unless very experienced, a separate safety rope would be provided. Thus the client would control their abseil descent whilst safeguarded by a safety rope.

The In Pinn summaries the head game nature of the Cuillin Munros. If you've saved them to last then you'll almost certainly have experienced longer days, tougher days but the Skye's Munros deserve their reputation for exposure and complexity. Respect that reputation, perhaps build yourself up to it but above all don't be put off. Give the Cuillin your best shot and hopefully you will achieve your dreams.



Sgurr nan Gillean



Sgurr Mhic Choinnich



Sgurr Dubh Mor



View to Loch Coruisk and the outlying Munro of Bla Bheinn. A view you'll get from Sgurr a Ghreadaidh and Sgurr a Mhadaidh



Am Bastier

References

The best reference book is undoubtedly the new edition of the SMC's guide to the Munros and is available from;

<https://www.smc.org.uk/publications/hillwalking/munros>

By buying the book direct you are helping support the SMC and Scottish Mountaineering Press and helping them continue to produce quality books with any profits going towards mountaineering and the environment



The SMC's Munro book and the view from our house looking towards Coire Banachdich with Sgurr Alasdair top right

The best map is Harvey's Superwalker XT25 Skye The Cuillin;
<https://www.harveymaps.co.uk/.../Skye--The-Cuillin-YHSWSK...>

This is super detailed with a scale of 1:25,000 of the whole area and on the reverse 1:12,500 close up of the Cuillin Ridge and it's Munros.



High above the clouds on Sgurr Mhic Choinnich with the In Pinn top left and Sgurr na Banachdich(centre) and Sgurr a Ghreadaidh(right). James Forrest and Nicola Hardy during their single season Munro round in 2019



70 year old Andy and Gerry Rennie “compleat” their Munro round on Sgurr Mhic Choinnich after 33 years of Munro bagging from their base in Cornwall. Gerry had all but given up hoping to finish the Munros after her previous Cuillin experiences. For her, it was a relief to finish but Andy returned later to do a complete traverse of the Cuillin Ridge



“The Bad Step” on Am Bastier is just a few metres to downclimb but the footholds are difficult to see from above and it’s in an exposed position with steep drops below to either side. Usually done with the protection of a rope but here Ted solos it during a Cuillin Ridge traverse. It can be bypassed by slabs to the left



282 done and dusted. Last Munro bagged and a celebratory Cuillin Cookie before descending the Great Stone Chute from Sgurr Alasdair

Kit List

Footwear; boots or approach shoes depending on your preference but make sure you are used to them because there are going to be some long days. If you are buying footwear specially for the course then feel free to ask any questions but do so in plenty of time so you can get some mileage done in your chosen footwear. Personal favourite; Scarpa Mescalito Mids GTX.

Socks; comfortable walking socks. Merino wool works really well, is comfortable, breathable and doesn't get too smelly. Best to get a merino wool/synthetic mix since pure merino wears out very quickly. Personal favourite; Smartwool socks.

Waterproofs; good quality top and trousers. Trousers need side zips to facilitate putting on when wearing boots/shoes. Personal Favourites; Marmot Precip or Arcteryx Alpha FL.

Base Layer; ideally one that wicks away sweat and dries quickly. Long sleeves and a collar and zip allow for temperature regulation and protection against sun burn.

Fleece/Warm layer; a light weight fleece or soft shell.

Gloves; gabbro is very abrasive so gloves are a good idea. Leather gloves are tough and Black Diamond make good models but for a cheaper alternative a pair of gardening gloves do the job. Depending on the forecast, you may also want warm gloves.

Headwear; warm hat of choice and possibly also a hat or buff to protect against the sun.

Pack; 30-40 litres rather than a very small pack which you may struggle to get everything in since you'll also have a harness and helmet as well as your usual walking gear. A dry bag to keep pack contents protected. Personal Favourite; Arcteryx FL45 which is ultra tough, very light and waterproof but is expensive.

Waterbottle/Camelback type bladder; 1-2 litres. Possibly a thermos of hot drink if the forecast is cold/windy.

Food; lunch and hill food for the day.

Head Torch; hopefully not needed but just in case.

Small personal first aid kit; just in case.

Bivi or survival type bag; just in case.

Harvey map of the Cuillin, Whistle, Phone.

Walking Poles; down to personal preference but very useful especially for descents at the end of a long day. Consider "Z" type poles such as Black Diamond Distance which collapse to a very short size and won't get in the way for scrambling.

Harness/Helmet/Belay Device and screwgate karabiner/Sling and screwgate karabiner; these are all provided on our courses but feel free to bring your own. Helmets vary enormously in cost and comfort so get to a shop and try them on. Black Diamond Half Dome is a good value and durable model. Harness should be simple and light.



Sgurr Alasdair, the highest point on Skye



The Inaccessible Pinnacle with the Great Stone Chute leading up to Sgurr Alasdair to the right and Bla Bheinn in clouds to left



Sgurr a Mhadaidh

Some Advice For Those Dreading the Cuillin Munros

1. Get Fit

If you're fit then you won't be puffing and wheezing your way up the mountains. Everything will seem easier if you are fitter. Once you start to physically struggle then it's all too easy to listen to the demons inside your head; fears can grow irrationally.

Try and get fit/fitter before a big trip to the hills but once there then be sensible. Eat and rehydrate well, go to bed early and don't overdo the booze; save the drink for the celebrations afterwards.

Don't try to pack too much in. Whilst some people will thrive on pressure, if you are a bit on the fearful side then a slowly/surely approach will more likely deliver dividends. Day after day of repeatedly confronting your fears can be too much for some people. Perhaps plan several visits to Skye or allow enough days to factor in less than ideal weather and some rest and recovery days. After all, there's no rush; the mountains will always be there for another day.

2. Climbing Walls

Consider going to a climbing wall or joining a club to learn the rudiments of climbing and abseiling rather than being thrown in at the deep end at the base of the Inaccessible Pinnacle. Get used to the gear, the harness, helmet, the rope. Learn that the gear can help to keep you safe and help expand your own personal comfort zone.

3. Scrambling

Scrambling, that intermediary stage between hill walking and rock climbing, is a skill that will be needed on most of the Cuillin Munros. It's often in very exposed situations and although technically easier than rock climbing, can seem scary to a beginner. Try and get out and do some easier scrambles, perhaps building up towards things like the Aonach Eagach ridge, get used to wearing a helmet and harness and being protected by a rope.

4. Fears

Recognise your fears, face them and try to overcome them, or, at least, channel them. There's nothing irrational about being scared of heights; it's a natural survival instinct. In some people this natural survival instinct may be extreme, bordering on a phobia.

Repeated exposure to steep ground, perhaps starting with minimal exposure and gradually building up, will help to overcome or at least control these very personal fears. The fear will still be there but you can learn to control it, to rationalize things as you learn to scramble and climb and begin to trust in the safety net that the climbing gear can provide. It's a joint mental and physical approach. As you get increasingly used to exposure and become more adept at scrambling the fears should become a bit more manageable.

Each little step forward or climb upwards will boost your confidence as you realise you have achieved what you previously thought impossible. Fear management is a skill and like any skill can be learnt. As your proficiency improves things become a bit more instinctive, practice pays off as you become able to do things with less or hardly any thought.

5. Set Goals

Once you've recognized your fears and decided to do something positive, then set yourself goals. Make the goals achievable so as to get early boosts to your confidence. Perhaps a simple climb or abseil at a local climbing wall or an easy scramble. Take easy, achievable steps so that after each mini challenge you go home feeling positive, a smile on your face.

Nothing will set you back more than being terrified so take little steps, each one leading you along the path towards the easiest Cuillin Munros and onwards. Come away from every goal with a list of positives. Things might not have been 100% perfect but take comfort from the positives. Perhaps you didn't get to the top of the climb but take heart from the fact you gave it a go.

6. Inspiration

Here are two tales of inspiration, of self professed scaredy cats who faced their fears and managed to bag the Cuillin Munros.

Donna Brown had built up the Inaccessible Pinnacle into a virtually impossible challenge, her doubts combatting her very obvious ability and determination. As it turned out, Donna versus the In Pinn was no challenge and it was one of the best days I've had in the hills. Donna faced down her nemesis and even smiled in the face of adversity.

Later Donna sent me an email and with her permission I'm sharing it as a bit of inspiration for all those doubting their ability to meet the challenge of the Cuillin Munros;

“Dear Adrian,

Just a message to say how grateful I am for yesterday. I really enjoyed it and for someone who isn't really fit, fast or strong this is a massive achievement for me. I'm always so thankful for every hill experience but Sgurr Dearg and the In Pinn was possibly a game changer, a life changing moment. A real lesson for me to reflect on when I think I cannot do something or achieve this or that...well actually perhaps I can.

Self doubt, fear and lack of confidence are obstacles emotionally to overcome but in all things in the last two years the mountains have helped me in all areas of my life.

Thank you for being an amazing guide and helping me achieve this. I cannot even express into words how it has made me feel. Plus the fact I got to share the moment with a good friend is just so special. I drove home to Fife after the In Pinn literally grinning from ear to ear for the whole six hour journey.”



Donna on the Inaccessible Pinnacle with support from good friend, Neil

Donna was a self professed scaredy cat yet she succeeded due to a variety of factors;

- i.** The main plus point was her mental stamina and determination which countered her huge doubts and fears.
- ii.** Having a good friend with her provided mental and physical support. Neil was able to not just encourage Donna but point out foot and hand holds. Perhaps most important was his presence as a confident figure nearby and ready to help.
- iii.** Timing helped a lot. We left perhaps two hours ahead of most guided groups so as to get the In Pinn to ourselves. Queues and people watching only add unnecessary pressure. The early start meant we had the climb to ourselves and also we were heading down for tea and cakes by the time the forecast bad weather came in.

Susan Flockhart

Susan was another Munroist who thought she might never “complete” and she probably takes pole position as number one scaredy cat.

If possible I try to meet clients the night before their big day, to get to know them, answer any questions and sort out gear like harnesses and helmets. In Susan’s case the pre big day meeting almost stopped her Munro mission in it’s tracks. Later she told me that just seeing the climbing gear worried her to tears and she’d had a sleepless night.

We opted to ascend Sgurr nan Gillean by it’s easiest route, the south east ridge. Susan did brilliantly and was over the moon to reach the summit. In fact she did so well that we decided to descend the more complicated west ridge which involves steep scrambling and an abseil.

On a real high, Susan then asked if we could do Am Bastier as well which we did before descending to Sligachan for a celebratory drink. A few trips later and all the Cuillin Munros were bagged, the grand finale being a day on Sgurr Mhic Choinnich and the In Pinn. Susan has already arranged a return visit to do the much more technical Pinnacle Ridge on Sgurr nan Gillean so the transformation is complete from scaredy cat to rock cat.

Susan later emailed me;

“Adrian,
thank you so much for helping me achieve something I could only have dreamed of. This time last year after my first visit to Skye I had given up the hope of completing all the Munros. With your guidance and, most of all, patience, I have achieved more than a dream.”



Susan having achieved her dream of all the Cuillin Munros and with her husband after ticking off the Inaccessible Pinnacle on her last day of the Cuillin Munros. Earlier she'd done Sgurr Mhic Choinnich



How it feels to have bagged the In Pinn. Nicola Hardy during her single season round of all the Munros in 2019 with James Forrest



View to the Cuillin Ridge from Bla Bheinn



Sgurr na Banachdich



Sgurr Mhic Choinnich with the In Pinn top left and Sgurr a Ghreadaidh and Sgurr a Mhadaidh top right. Sgurr na Banachdich is between the two climbers with yellow and green jackets



On Sgurr a Mhadaidh with Sgurr Thuilm in the background



Sgurr nan Eag, the most southerly Cuillin Munro



Sgurr a Ghreadaidh



Bill and Will Dobbie from Raasay Distillery with their inaugural single malt on the summit of Sgurr Alasdair. How will you toast your Munro successes?



The west ridge of Sgurr nan Gillean. Don't worry if the climbing puts you off since there's an easier scramble via the south east ridge

Get in touch with any questions or if you want help planning how to do the Cuillin Munros whether under your own steam or guided;

atrendall@googlemail.com

07540 593415

<https://allthingscuillin.co.uk/>

As with any mountain activity, weather and conditions play a very important part in decision making and any course will be dependent on safety considerations and plans may have to be altered and other options offered. Some Munros lend themselves better than others to bad

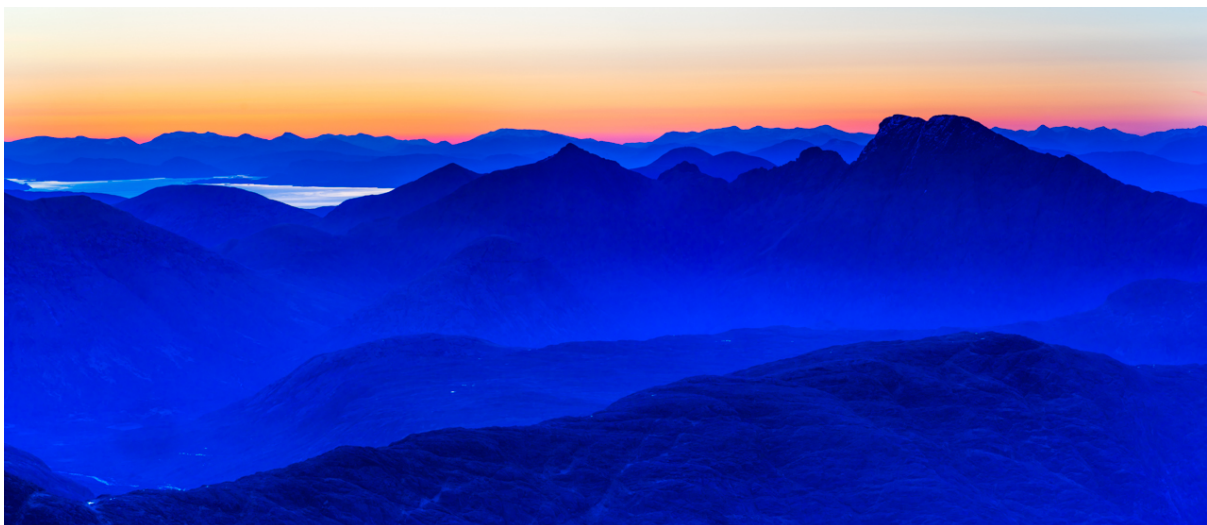
weather. The In Pinn isn't going to be much fun in heavy rain and high winds but a quick trip out from An Dorus to Sgurr a Ghreadaidh and/or Sgurr a Mhadaidh may be possible.

Our preferred forecast is the Met Office's Mountain Weather forecast for the north west highlands where individual Munros can be selected.

<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/specialist-forecasts/mountain/northwest-highlands#?tab=mountainMap&map=Summits&zoom=7&lon=-5.41&lat=57.81&locId=353421&date=2021-06-14>



The In Pinn. The figure gives an idea of scale. The easiest route is the right sky line and the abseil is in the shadow on the left. The ascent is about 65 metres and split into two stages. The abseil is about 18 metres



Bla Bheinn, the outlying Munro is on the right .Photo taken just before sunrise sunrise from Sgurr na Banachdich

