

A 'Classic' Scottish Ski Tour...

By Di Gilbert
All photos by the Author



This is the first in a series of articles designed to inspire and encourage off-piste ski adventures in the Scottish Hills

"After a week of the heaviest snow in Scotland for nearly 50 years, forecasters are warning that it could persist into the New Year. Although they are predicting less snow, there is no prospect of the mounds of white stuff melting away"
Herald Scotland, 5th December 2010

On the same day, I sent Louella one short text - "Fancy an adventure? Not really about the ski, more about the journey".

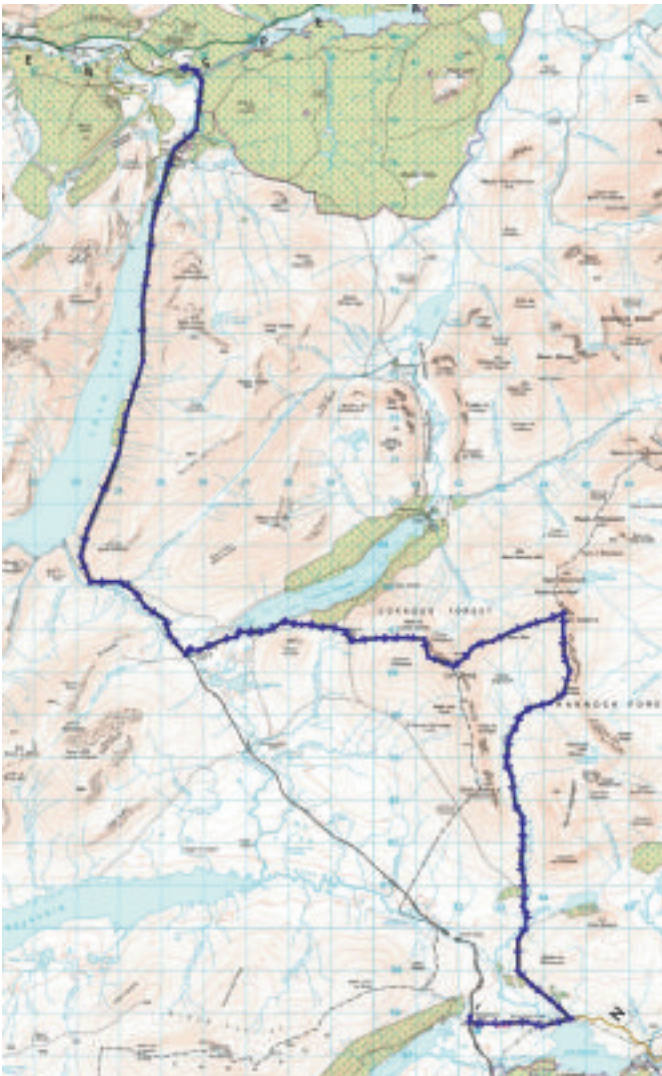
It was a simple plan – albeit rather last minute. We would catch the 12.15 train from Tulloch Station bound for Corrour then ski over a couple

of Munros, arriving in plenty of time to catch the 21.07 from Rannoch back to Tulloch. A cunning plan that would leave us time to celebrate our victorious success over a pint in a nearby hostelry. Bearing in mind that it was getting pretty close to the shortest day of the year and there was unlikely to





Corrou Station



Ordnance Survey mapping © Crown Copyright. AM007/11

be a very good base of snow low down, we played safe and threw some lightweight bivvy kit into their rucksacks. Little did we realise how crucial that decision was!

We nearly missed the train from Tulloch, both of us slightly underestimating how long it would take to get to the train station due to the condition of the snowy roads. Fifteen minutes later the train rumbled into the lonely outpost of Corrou Station and we were deposited into a 'winter wonderland'. After an impromptu hot chocolate at the station cafe we set off on what we imagined would be an enjoyable afternoon ski south, over a couple of hills to Rannoch Station.

Skinning along the land rover track passed fairly quickly, with Loch Ossian looking amazing under a blanket of snow. However, conditions under ski, once the luxury of the land rover track were left behind started to give an indication of things to come.... a constant battle of deep and even deeper heather with not quite enough snow on top made the uphill progress slow and arduous - and with limited daylight ahead the pressure was on. Our route passed Peter's Rock and gained height towards Carn Dearg (941m), and as the summit was gained, we were rewarded with amazing views to the west. Needless to say there were numerous "oohs" and "aahs" within the party. Louella said that she had never had a

mountain day like it before.

Skins remained on, as we continued to Mam Ban where we finally admitted defeat to the failing daylight and put on head torches. Someone forgot to mention to Sgor Gaibhre (955m) that it was supposed to be nice weather and for about 40 minutes we were blasted with blowing snow and biting cold temperatures. Still a gradual and speedy descent to Rannoch Station lay ahead.

Dream on! Instead we battled through 'lady-eating' peat bogs and knee-deep heather; Scottish skiing at its very best! The single tarmac road leading the final kilometre to the Station was a welcome reprieve; we were so exhausted that I was convinced that Louella was sleeping as she skied along. Rannoch Station had been reached, 10.5 hours after leaving Corrou and only missing the last train by a mere 2 hours!

There was a time when the weary traveller could be guaranteed shelter at remote Scottish stations. Sadly, those days are long gone and the only vestige of shelter for us was to huddle in our bivvy kit under the overhang at the side of the station building... a long, cold night lay ahead.

On the 7th December 2010, Scotland's transport minister "apologised after hundreds of motorists were stranded overnight after heavy snow brought chaos to main routes". BBC News, 7 December 2010

Ascending Sgor Gaibhre



Sleep in those searing cold conditions eluded us. The stove refused to work, water froze and part of the crown on my front tooth fell out. Looking to the positive, there was certainly not a problem with missing the first train in the morning as the London sleeper would be first through.

"Temperatures in Scotland dropped well below freezing overnight to as low as minus 18 Celsius, and more heavy snow trapped many drivers in their vehicles while others abandoned their cars".

Reuters, 7 December 2010

The sleeper was due at 8am; 8am came and went. The timetable posted on the platform assured the girls that the next train was due at 9am. But 9am came and went..... Rannoch Station resembled a scene from 'Ice Station Zebra'; stark and isolated, nothing moved other than the snow ripping past our open shelter. We spotted that little yellow box on the station wall which in recent times has taken the job of a stationmaster. I picked

up the receiver and finally spoke to someone from the outside world, 21 hours after our last contact with human life at Corrour.

"Hello, National Rail, how can I help?"

"This is Di on Rannoch Station. Can you tell me when the 0900 will be coming to Rannoch please?"

"One minute please..... Hello dear, the 0900 has been terminated in Edinburgh"

"Oh, why's that?" [Long pause] "Hello?"

"The snow, dear"

"Oh, can you tell me when the next train to Rannoch will be either heading north or south?"

"One minute please.... Yes, the 1108"

"Thank you, Goodbye"

Mid-day passed and still no train.

"Hello, National Rail, how can I help?"

"Hello, this is Di on Rannoch Station again. Could you tell me when the 1108 will be coming to Rannoch please?"

"Oh, it should have been



with you by now"

"Erm, I don't see it"

"One minute please... it is coming, it's got held up at Crianlarich"

"Hurrah, thank you"

Sometime later, the 1108 did arrive. The train was empty except for National Rail staff who seemed slightly bemused as two bedraggled girls stepped gratefully into the warmth and security of the train. The toilets didn't work, there was no coffee trolley, but we did get a free ride north back to Tulloch Station.

Postscript:

Despite all the above, Louella and Di are still great friends who continue to have many adventures on the hills. Louella still thinks that it was one of her best days on the mountain she has ever had!



Di Gilbert & STAG

Di is a full-time mountaineering instructor. She has climbed, skied and walked extensively in numerous mountain areas of the world. She has successfully guided all of the seven highest mountains in the world and completed her Munros. This combined with her fifteen years of Scottish Ski Mountaineering experience and representing Britain in the Alpine ski mountaineering race last season ensures she is a valuable asset to the MCoFS Ski Touring Advisory Group

More information about Di and her mountaineering and ski courses can be viewed at www.digilbert.co.uk.

Full details of the work of the recently formed MCoFS Ski Touring Advisory Group (STAG) and how you might get involved can be viewed at www.mcofs.org.uk/ski-touring.asp