

BEN MACDUI AND THE MAR LODGE ESTATE (moderate to strenuous)



What you'll see: Caledonian pine forest and the splendid Cairngorm mountains

BEN MACDUI (1309m) is the second highest mountain in the UK and its great rounded summit dome, ringed by high corries, cliffs and steep boulder strewn slopes, occupies a central position in the middle of the Cairngorm plateau. There is no finer place from which to view the massive National Trust for Scotland Mar Lodge Estate and the 14 mountain 'Munro' summits which it contains.

Macdui is not a classic mountain shape though and it remains fairly well hidden amidst the surrounding hills and its own vast bulk. It does however have many fine points but these are only revealed to those prepared to venture into its midst.

Whilst not all will wish to go the distance with Macdui, the much shorter trip, either on foot, or by cycle, to Derry Lodge allows one to explore the delightful Caledonian woodland around the flats here and feel the tranquillity of this lovely glen deep in the heart of The Cairngorms.

From the north side of the car park, a path leads to the track that runs through Glen Lui to Derry Lodge; the use of a bicycle on this section considerably short-



ens any onward trip. If heading for the heights, leave the bike here and proceed on foot, crossing the bridge to follow the burn west through Glen Luibeg. The glen swings northwards into the narrows between Carn Crom and Carn a' Mhaim, passing the Luibeg Bridge and the Lairig Ghru path. Ben Macdui and the fine cliffs of Coire Sputan Dearg now lie ahead.

The path runs up the ridge on the left of these cliffs, onto Sron Riach where there is a splendid view of Lochan Uaine nestling beneath the cliffs in the coire below. Drop down a little, then ascend along the top of the cliffs before heading across boulder strewn slopes to the summit of Macdui. On a good day the summit panorama is extensive.

Until the early 1800's Ben Macdui was thought to be the country's highest mountain,

with the doubt only being cleared by the Ordnance Survey in 1847; the remnants of their surveyors hut, 'the Sappers Bothy', lie just east of the summit. Despite this downgrading, Queen Victoria trekked to the top from Glen Derry in 1859; albeit on a pony led by John Brown.

For the return, head back eastwards towards the cliffs and descend a good path to Loch Etchachan, then down beside the outflow which tumbles down the hillside in front of the great cliffs of Creagan a' Choire Etchachan to reach the Hutchison Memorial Hut.

From here a long but peaceful walk leads down Glen Derry to where the path forks just before the pine woods. Either route leads pleasantly back to Derry Lodge.

The essentials

MAP OS LANDRANGER SHEET 43 & 36
DISTANCE 7 MILES (11KM) RETURN TO DERRY LODGE
 PLUS 13 MILES (20KM) RETURN TO BEN MACDUI
GRADE MODERATE TO STRENUOUS
TIME 1-3 HOURS PLUS 5-6 HOURS
START/FINISH NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND
 LINN OF DEE CAR PARK, BRAEMAR (NO 064 898)