



Route Summary

Summary: Suilven may be only 731 metres high, but its remarkable outline make it one of Scotland's best known and most easily identified mountains. Its position in the heart of Assynt's cnoc-and-loch landscape and superb views make it one of the finest peaks in Britain. Terrain: Tracks and hill-paths throughout by the route described; the climb to the ridge is very steep. Very simple scrambling on the ridge.

Route Overview



Category: Walking
Length: 19.800 km / 12.38 mi
Date Published: 19th April 2011
Difficulty: Very Hard
Rating: ★★★★★
Surface: Rough
Last Modified: 11th June 2018

Description

Summary:

Suilven may be only 731 metres high, but its remarkable outline make it one of Scotland's best known and most easily identified mountains. Its position in the heart of Assynt's cnoc-and-loch landscape and superb views make it one of the finest peaks in Britain.

Terrain:

Tracks and hill-paths throughout by the route described; the climb to the ridge is very steep. Very simple scrambling on the ridge.

Time: 7 - 9 hours

Gaelic pronunciation and meaning: Tap to listen

Route description

Stage 1

Suilven's remarkable outline, although distant, dominates the scene at Lochinver, but from here only the great dome-

shaped western summit of Caisteal Liath is visible. From the east Suilven appears as a Matterhorn-like spire, whereas only to the north and south is the true nature of this remarkable ridge revealed. To climb it, park at the end of the minor public road from Lochinver towards Glencanisp Lodge. The public road ends where a track goes off to the south to cross the outflow of Loch Druim Suardalain. There is limited space and those not arriving early may have to walk up from Lochinver itself.



Stage 2

Begin the walk by continuing along the now-private tarmac road along the northern shore of the loch to reach the woods surrounding Glencanisp Lodge. This luxurious former shooting lodge is now owned by the local community following the estate buyout through the Assynt Foundation. Turn left at the fork to pass behind Glencanisp Lodge (where there is an honesty shop selling snacks), then keep right on the track and then left, staying on the main track at a fork. The track becomes a rougher ATV track and passes through a gate. It crosses a rugged, rocky and undulating landscape for the next few kilometres; the great peak of Caisteal Liath at the western end of Suilven being prominent, together with the more conventional cone of Canisp to its left.



Stage 3

After almost three kilometres a junction is reached. A short detour to the left here takes you up to Suileag Bothy, which is maintained by volunteers from the Mountain Bothy Association. If you visit the bothy, please help the maintenance volunteers by carrying out any rubbish you find there, and always follow the bothy code when visiting. Return to the junction to continue on the ATV track towards Suilven (and Canisp); it soon slopes down beside the Abhainn na Clach Airigh. Keep on the track which now remains closer to the stream (which flows through Loch Buidhe) before crossing it at a bridge after a couple of kilometres.



Stage 4

It now climbs a little away from the stream before approaching it once more; look out for a well-made path leading off to the right around 600m after the bridge. The path aims directly for Suilven; the first section across the moorland had become very boggy and eroded but has been greatly improved recently by the John Muir Trust and the Assynt Foundation. It now provides excellent going; after 700m or so it climbs up to reach a higher level of the moor, passing alongside Loch a' Choire Dhuibh.



Stage 5

The path passes to the right of the loch before heading into the grassy gully that leads to the 'nick' on Suilven's ridge between the western dome and the rest of the ridge. The ascent of the gully might look intimidating, but it is merely a very steep walk requiring care and effort. After the first section in the gully the path zig-zags off to the left to ease the gradient, before returning to the gully in the upper section and then heading left to gain the ridge. The sudden moment of arrival at the ridge at the top of the gully is magical, with a wonderful aerial view opening up to the south towards Stac Pollaidh at that very instant - well captured by Norman MacCaig in his poem 'Climbing Suilven', when he writes

And suddenly

My shadow jumps huge miles away from me.



Stage 6

At the ridge, turn right. Soon the path crosses the remains of a quite amazing drystone dyke (or wall) - it is thought this might have been built in exchange for famine relief during the Highland potato famines; note the level courses of stones maintained even though the wall is at an absurd gradient. Beyond the wall the path begins ascending towards the summit, winding to and fro with a little very easy scrambling.



Stage 7

A level section is reached and the path switches briefly to the north side of the ridge before crossing a narrow neck before the final dome. The view looking back along the ridge to the amazing spire of Meall Meadhonach is simply sensational.



Stage 8

Continue up the final rocky slope to reach the grassy domed summit of Caisteal Liath. This is the true summit of Suilven, at 731 metres; the view in all directions is staggering.



Stage 9

The view both north and south takes in the rocky knolls and lochans (cnocs and lochs) of the remarkably watery Assynt landscape. From a short distance beyond the cairn is a great view down to Lochinver. The only walkers route off Caisteal Liath is back to the bealach; from here you can make a detour up to Meall Meadhonach if you wish, involving some slightly harder scrambling into a gap before the final rise to the peak. The return walk is to retrace your steps back down the gully used for the ascent, and all the way back to Lochinver.



Waypoints

