



The Cuillin Ridge

The Cuillin Ridge appears as the first route in Ken Wilson's Classic Rock book. It is the finest ridge line in the UK and is made up of 12km's of peaks, knife edge ridges, sea views, sheer faces, tricky navigation, rolling mists and worn feet and broken hands from 3000m of ascent, 11 Munros and some technical climbing. If you want to experience it too it's full, break the ridge into two days and try a moonlight night out; fortunately in summer the ridge ends in a pub and a dram of whisky.

Leslie Shabolt and Alastair McLaren completed the first continuous traverse of the Cuillin Ridge in 1911, making their way from south to north in around 12 hours. This is still a respectable time today though a few have done it in less than four hours. It begins on Gars-Bheinn and ends at the pyramid peak of Sgurr nan Gillian.

I climbed this at the end of summer 2014 and here are a few hints and tips for the traverse. There are many other sources of information on the internet and these are just my thoughts on it; they are by no means comprehensive, however if used in conjunction with other sources you'll be as ready as you can! I hope they help.

There are numerous ways of tackling it; some prefer an early start and a one day dash which works in a narrow weather window and if you are very fit. Others like a 1 ½ day approach leaving Glen Brittle late in the day to bivvy near the start around Gars-Bheinn, then complete it the next day. If weather is in your favour; then I'd prefer to make a relaxed start (10am) and bivvy somewhere in the middle completing it over two days; the bivvy on the ridge (we did so, just next to the Inn Pinn) is a magical moment to have in the British hills and the ridge is so good the more time you're up there the better the experience will be.

The best time of year for the traverse is between May and September. A high pressure system with high clouds to keep off the sun will be the most favourable conditions to do it in as a lot of your thoughts on the ridge will be about water. Once on the ridge there are only a couple of spots to refill your bottles a small distance down (one just before the TD gap and one just after the Inn Pinn). On the approaches to the ridge there are numerous points to get water so you can fill your bottles at the last stream before Gars Bheinn and brew up a tea on the way down from Sgurr nan Gillean to get you back the last few miles to Sligachan.

The climbing difficulties are as follows;

- The TD Gap - a short abseil followed by a slippery VD; though it will feel more like severe due to the polish and the pack on your back.
- The Kings Chimney - a spectacular Diff pitch.
- An Stac – said by some to be loose and unpleasant but I found a very nice way up this.
- The Inn Pinn – Moderate and the only Munro that involves mandatory climbing. We moved together on this, then abseiled off and bivvied for the night.
- Naismiths Route – VD and at the end so it may feel more difficult with the fatigue.
- The rest is superb and at times exposed scrambling, you may feel the need to bring the rope out on parts of this and with the occasional abseil if you don't get your navigation right!
- Any of these can be bypassed by various means but that would spoil the fun.

A simple rack such as this will be fine. We took three cams, half a set of wires, a few slings, 5 quickdraws, one large hex and a 50m half rope. I wore my helmet most of the time I was on the ridge.

Other kit we took were a sleeping bag (some leave this behind and take a heavy belay jacket to sleep in, those that I have known to do this have suffered!), mat, bivvy bag, 35l rucksack, waterproofs and a light insulated jacket, head torch and synthetic clothing. Midge repellent. Food which is easy to prepare and a small gas stove; the MSR Reactor works really well even in a wind so we took that, it's also very efficient so we took the smallest gas canister available.

The SMC do a great guide to scrambling on Skye and we photocopied the 13 page route description. We used an iPhone for navigation and it worked well over the two days. We also used it to take all the pictures. We carried a back-up battery to recharge it, this was good for three or more charges.

Fitness; get fit and above all keep moving at a steady pace. We left at 10am from Glen Brittle after a decent fry up and bivvied at the Inn Pinn at around 8pm. The next day we got up around 8am, de-

camped and scrambled for an hour or so before having breakfast. We arrived at Sgurr nan Gillian at about 6pm that day and then the Sligachan Hotel at about 8pm.

Watch out for sunshine and dehydration; as above you'll spend quite a bit of time thinking about water on the ridge.

The Clach Glas/Bla Bheinn traverse is a good warm up for the ridge though we used it as a warm down, it's brilliant and worth doing in its own right.

Of the eight people we set off with from Glen Brittle half did not complete; one party were going too slowly so remember to be fit and one party did not bring sleeping bags so after an uncomfortable night they decided to go down.

Good weather is one of the keys to success.

This is but no means a comprehensive list of do and do not's and there's plenty of other information available on the internet and other sources and then sometimes it's best not to worry too much and just embrace the adventure and get on with enjoying the UK's finest ridge.

[Photographs of the ridge can be found on this Facebook Page](#)



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