

21 in 21 Act 6

Meall Blair + Loch Blair



A Foxy is the combined traverse of a loch or lake (over 1km) and the summiting of a mountain (over 2,000 ft) bearing the same name. (See May 2022, p21.)



In the cloud on Loch Blair.

We arrived back in Hertfordshire on the Monday. It was then that we realized that we did not have any plans for the imminent August Bank Holiday weekend. It was an easy choice, head back to Scotland to finish what we had started.

We spent Friday night in the car just outside Fort William; as soon as I woke up I drove onwards, taking the back road through to Gairloch and then inland towards Loch Arkaig. Already the days appeared to be getting shorter and it was surprisingly dark at 5.30am. It is a narrow undulating road that skirts Loch Arkaig, not one where you would want to meet a large oncoming vehicle and have to face reversing. We parked at Arcabhi, next to an electricity station. Breakfast was somewhat less than relaxed as the midges suddenly appeared and were, as ever, an unwelcome irritant. Anne stayed tucked up inside the car. However, despite the midges, I managed to down my instant porridge and hot chocolate mix, sling my prepacked rucksack over my shoulders and head up the track towards Loch Blair.

The track was steep but at least it was easy going underfoot and I reached the level of the loch within about 45 minutes; all of the time I had been enveloped in damp cloud with limited visibility. It was now time to head east up towards the summit of Meall Blair but there were no readily discernible paths. My route struck up through heather and grass, the dew laden cobwebs starting to soak through my boots. I was beginning to think that this trek would be cloudbound all the way up and back down; the guides that I had read online had not waxed lyrical about this as a walk but did recommend the viewpoints.

As I looked up there was a glimmer of sunlight;

the rays of the sun were starting to show over a cloud obscured horizon ahead. I continued to climb through the cloud, head down, watching my footsteps, but then, suddenly, the sun hit me with its full force. I was out of the cloud and I was above a cloud inversion and I could see. It was spectacular, surrounded by silhouetted peaks in all shades of blue from the head of Loch Arkaig and looking back towards Ben Nevis, a truly stunning spectacle. As I looked down into the clouds I saw a double halo with a figure in the middle; it was my personal Brocken spectre. It was a very mesmerizing moment. Suddenly this day had just got better. The heather and grass started to thin out as I ascended and the going got easier as I neared the top. Finally, in just under two hours, I reached the summit cairn.

The inversion was holding as I took my time to drink in the view and soak up the warmth. I was conscious that, somewhere below me, in the clouds, was Loch Blair. I made my way back down, eventually diving back into the clouds until I reached the shores

of Loch Blair. It was a simple task to inflate the packraft and get afloat. It was all quiet and very still as I paddled out into the cloud shrouded waters. Gradually, the cloud shifted and the northern shore of the loch became visible. I paddled a loop on the loch, savouring the warmth of the sun and the quietness of this loch. Having deflated the raft and packed up, I took a short walk back along the side of the loch to reach the track and the final descent. By the time

I was back at the car the clouds had dispersed from Loch Arkaig and there were clear views to the peaks at the western end of the loch. After a quick brew we packed up and set the satnav for Torridon and Ben Damh.



Lyra at Loch Arkaig.



Ben Nevis inversion from the summit of Meall Blair.