

A few days in Cairngorm.

Bernard Smith, Jan 2010.

Taking advantage of the recent wintery conditions we ignored the advice to stay at home and drove to Aviemore. Drumochter pass was easily passable but the snow lay thick in Aviemore itself, more than I have ever seen. Parking at the Coire na Ciste car park we skinned up Sron an Aonaich to the summit of Cairngorm. The pistes were fairly busy but we avoided them as far as possible. We had a cloudless, wind free day and lunching by the weather station on the summit we were entertained by students from Herriot Watt University trying to chip the ice off the gadgetry. Scotland was white to the horizon, Macdui, Braeriach & Cairntoul looking alpine in stature. We skied off towards Cairn Lochan with the intention of descending Lurchers Gully, but with the Sun low in the sky we decided that Fiacail ridge was a better option.

Another snowfall in the night had the usual effect of closing the ski road and once in the queue it was impossible to escape. This shortened our day considerably so we bought a half day ticket. It was possible to ski anywhere and we spent the day off piste in knee deep powder. The highlight was a descent from the summit cairn down the headwall of Coire Cas. However Lurchers had eluded us again.

We avoided the Sunday crowds by skinning up the Fiacail ridge, but the snow pluming off the plateau was a warning of what to expect higher up. As the buffeting became serious we turned round and enjoyed the ski down.

Having had our fill of the ski slopes we needed a change. The problem was that all the side roads were impassable. Meall na Bhuachaille, a Corbett behind Glenmore Lodge, provided a convenient objective. Parking near the campsite we skinned into Ryvoan bothy for lunch. The skin up to the summit was straightforward and the wind was acceptable at this altitude. The ski down to the Green Lochan was superb especially the last bit threading through the trees. We poled back past the Lodge to the car after a cracking day.

The snow by now was suffering from the wind with a crust and sastrugi developing. Parking at Lynwilg we skinned up the track onto Geal Charn Mor, another Corbett behind Aviemore. The weather was now more traditional and we found ourselves in a whiteout on the top. It was reassuring to find that skins still had the ability to glue themselves round your neck in a gale, and fingers froze in the battle. Out of the mist appeared a track laying tractor towing fodder for the reindeer, or maybe it was Santa returning home. At any rate we decided it was time for us to return home as we had had the best of the snow. The following day we just managed to get over Drumochter Pass before the drifting snow closed it again.



