

Before you go

16 km (10 miles) there and back; normally 6 to 8 hours, and sometimes longer, the Nevis Landscape Partnership says; 7 to 9 hours by VisitScotland's reckoning, 3½ to 4½ of them on the way up. The path grows rockier, more arduous and more exposed the higher it goes.

Set off early so you are not coming down in the dark, and tell someone your route and when you expect to be back. Carry a map and compass and know how to use them: the leaflet names OS Landranger 41, OS Explorer 392 and Harvey's Ben Nevis map. A phone signal is not to be relied on. Check the mountain forecast, shown at the Visitor Centre too: the summit can be

below freezing on a sunny day. In winter the climb is for experienced mountaineers only.

Start at the Visitor Centre car park, about 2 km from Fort William, and use its toilets before you go; there are no bins on the hill, so take all litter home. VisitScotland recommends the climb only for children of 10 and over; dogs are best on a lead when the path is busy.

After the walk

The summit holds the ruin of the Old Observatory, opened in 1883 and abandoned in 1904, VisitScotland says, and on a clear day the view can reach as far as Northern Ireland.



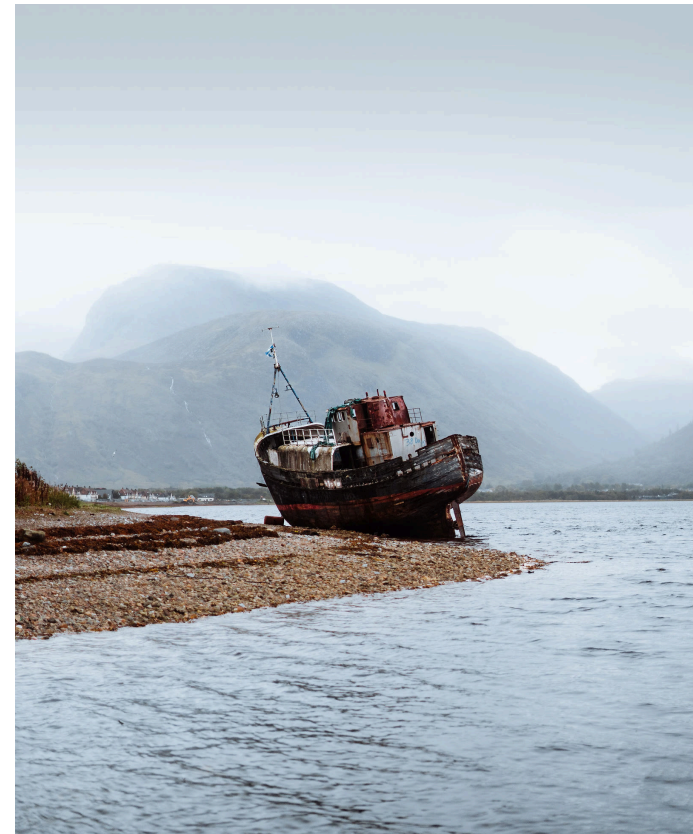
The walk online, with its photographs and map:
hiddenscotland.com/walks/ben-nevis-by-the-mountain-track

It starts at the Ben Nevis Visitor Centre car park in Glen Nevis, NN 122 730.

If someone is hurt, dial 999 and ask for the Police, then Mountain Rescue: a team can take several hours to reach you.

A MUNRO WALK UP

Ben Nevis



A HIDDEN SCOTLAND WALK

By the Mountain Track

Ben Nevis, at 1,345 metres the highest mountain in Britain, rises over Fort William. The Mountain Track climbs from the Visitor Centre in Glen Nevis to the halfway lochan, over the Red Burn and up the zigzags to a summit plateau ringed by steep, dangerous ground: a long, hard mountain day that asks for a map, a compass and the skill to use them.

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A steep climb brings you up to Lochan Meall an t-Suidhe, the halfway lochan, where the path divides. Take the right-hand fork, the Mountain Track. The left goes under the North Face to the Carn Mor Dearg Arete, for experienced scramblers only: keep to the Mountain Track here, on the way down as well as the way up. The leaflet calls the Red Burn the halfway point. If it has taken you 2 hours to get here, allow at least as long again to the summit. If you are in any doubt, about the weather, the time or how you feel, turn back.

Above the Red Burn the track climbs the western face in sharp bends, the zigzags: rocky and arduous, with scree and loose stones. Snow can lie at any time of year, and where it does it hides the path. On the summit plateau steep, dangerous ground lies all round you,

with cliffs of 600 metres on the north-east face. Keep to the main route and well back from the edge, above all in wind or snow, when cornices overhang ready to break away. At the top of Five Finger Gully a gentle slope quickly leads on to steep cliffs: many accidents happen there.

In cloud or hill fog you depend on a map and compass: set a bearing, walk on it and count your paces. Without those skills, do not go above the snow line in fog; a GPS is a back-up, never the only way. A cairn marks the top, 1,345 metres (4,413 feet) up; the summit shelter is for emergencies only. Before you start down, take a bearing so you leave by the right path. Home is the same way, keeping to the Mountain Track at the lochan: many accidents happen on the descent.



The Mountain Track and back: 16 km, the Nevis Landscape Partnership says.

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