Before you go

No public body gives a distance or a time for this walk. By our map it is about 7 km (4¼ miles) there and back with about 620 metres of climb, and takes about 3 to 4 hours, more with stops, in poor weather or under snow. It is a serious walk even in summer: for much of the way you are on ground above 3,000 feet, and by our map this way is above it for its last 2 km. Summit winds of over 170 miles an hour have been recorded, a gust of 173 in March 1986. In a white-out the plateau becomes featureless, and when visibility is poor navigation can be tricky.

Under snow it is a winter mountain, and winter conditions often last well into spring: it needs navigation skills, crampons and an ice axe and the skill to use them, and be prepared to turn back. The hill lies in the core of the Northern Cairngorms avalanche forecast area: read its forecast. Call in at the Ranger Base and fill in Cairngorm Mountain's digital route card. Check the mountain forecast. Carry a map and compass and know how to use them, and do not rely only on a phone or GPS. Leave word of where you are going.

The ski road runs from Aviemore past Loch Morlich to the car park, beside the Base Station, where there are toilets. In 2026 it is free for 45 minutes, then £3.50 for up to 8 hours or £5.50 for up to 18, free with a Blue Badge and in the snowsports season. The Aviemore Adventurer 30 bus runs to the Base Station seven days a week.

After the walk

Go back the way you came: north from the summit by the cairns to the Ptarmigan, then down the Windy Ridge Path. The plateau beyond the summit is not part of this walk: six people died on it in a blizzard in 1971, at Feith Buidhe, the UK's worst mountaineering disaster.

The walk online, with its film and map:
hiddenscotland.com/walks/cairn-gorm-from-coire-cas

It starts at the Coire Cas car park at Cairngorm Mountain, at the top of the ski road from Aviemore past Loch Morlich, NH 989 062.

In an emergency, call 999 or 112 and ask for Police and Mountain Rescue, Mountaineering Scotland says, and give your location as exactly as you can, ideally a six-figure grid reference and a named feature. Do not rely only on a phone or GPS.

HIDDEN
SCOTLAND

A MUNRO WALK UP

Cairn Gorm



A HIDDEN SCOTLAND WALK

From Coire Cas

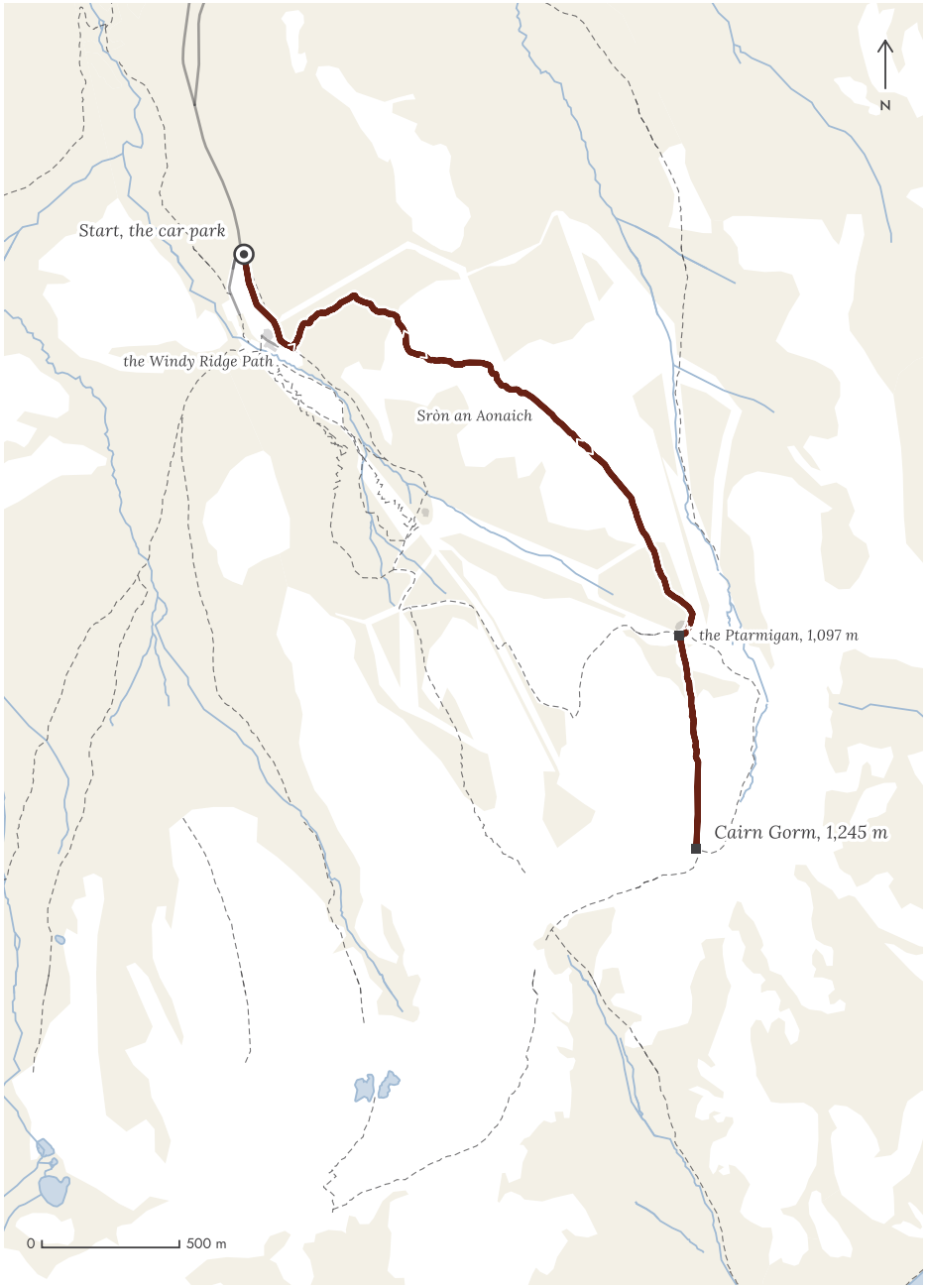
Cairn Gorm, 1,245 metres, is the sixth highest of the Munros, on the northern edge of the Cairngorm plateau. This is the usual way up from the Coire Cas car park: the Windy Ridge Path up Sròn an Aonaich to the Ptarmigan, the funicular's top station, then the Summit Path to the top, and back the same way. The path is good, but the summit is high, bare ground where a gale or a white-out is the danger: a day for hillwalkers who can find their way with a map and compass.

words // Hidden Scotland

From the car park walk up the track between the Day Lodge and the Base Station. Just after it passes under the funicular the Windy Ridge Path leaves it on the left, steep at first beside the ski runs, then turning east and easing before it swings south up the broad ridge of Sròn an Aonaich. Out on the hill there are no waymarks or signposts, and in winter the waymarks for the walking trails inside the ski area are taken away: ask at the Ranger Base.

By our map the path climbs about 440 metres in 2.3 km to the Ptarmigan, at 1,097 metres. The funicular does not carry walkers up, and outside the snowsports season its passengers may not leave the Ptarmigan building. Behind the building a path with posts on either side, linked by rope in summer, starts the last climb, and beyond the last posts a line of cairns leads over stony, bouldery ground to the summit, about 0.8 km on.

The summit, a large cairn with the weather station beside it, is straightforward only in clear, calm weather: when the hill is stormbound any ascent or descent can be potentially lethal. It is barren and featureless, ringed by steep drops, and in a white-out you can lose your bearings in moments. The cliffs above Coire an t-Sneachda and Coire an Lochain lie to the west, and in winter cornices can reach well out beyond the edge. If the cloud comes down, the wind rises or anyone is tiring, turn back, and in mist take a bearing off the top.



Up Cairn Gorm by the Windy Ridge Path and back the same way: about 3 to 4 hours.

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