Before you go

No public body gives a route, a distance or a time for this walk. By our map it is about 8½ km (a little over 5 miles) there and back with about 750 metres of climb: allow about 4 to 5 hours, by our map's distance and climb, more with stops, in poor weather or under snow. Under snow Carn Liath is a winter mountain, for walkers with winter skills, an ice axe and crampons; one guide allows up to 2 hours more. It is in the Creag Meagaidh avalanche forecast area: read the forecast before you go. On 4 April 2026 a falling cornice set off a small slab avalanche in Coire Dubh, on the Carn Liath massif. Keep well back from corniced edges. No forecast does not mean no risk.

Check the mountain forecast: the Mountain Weather Information Service's West Highlands forecast and the Met Office's North Grampian mountain forecast cover these hills. It grows colder as you climb, about 1°C for every 100 metres, the wind usually rises with height, cloud can come down fast and burns can rise markedly in a day, MunroMagic says. Carry a map and compass and know how to use them, with warm, waterproof clothing, food and drink: Steven Fallon rates the navigation on these hills as difficult, and phone reception in the Highlands is often patchy or missing, Mountaineering Scotland says. Leave word with someone of where you are going and when you will be back.

NatureScot keeps the land south of the ridge, and the Heading for the Scottish Hills tables record no stalking issues there. On the hills round about, stags may be stalked at any time of year, busiest in the first three weeks of October, and hinds from 21 October to 15 February, Mountaineering Scotland says: follow any local notices, and if in doubt keep to the well-known way. There is no set charge at the car park, though a donation is asked for its upkeep, Steven Fallon says.

After the walk

Many walkers go on west along the ridge to Stob Poite Coire Ardair, and some to Creag Meagaidh as well, Steven Fallon says, and a longer way comes in from Garva Bridge to the north-east. This walk keeps to Carn Liath, there and back.

The walk online, with its film and map:
hiddenscotland.com/walks/carn-liath-from-aberarder

It starts at the Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve's car park at Aberarder, on the A86 by Loch Laggan, NN 482 872.

In an emergency, call 999 or 112 and ask for Police and Mountain Rescue, Mountaineering Scotland says, and give a six-figure grid reference and a named feature if you can. To text 999 where a call will not connect, register first by texting register to 999.

A MUNRO WALK UP

Carn Liath



A HIDDEN SCOTLAND WALK

From Aberarder

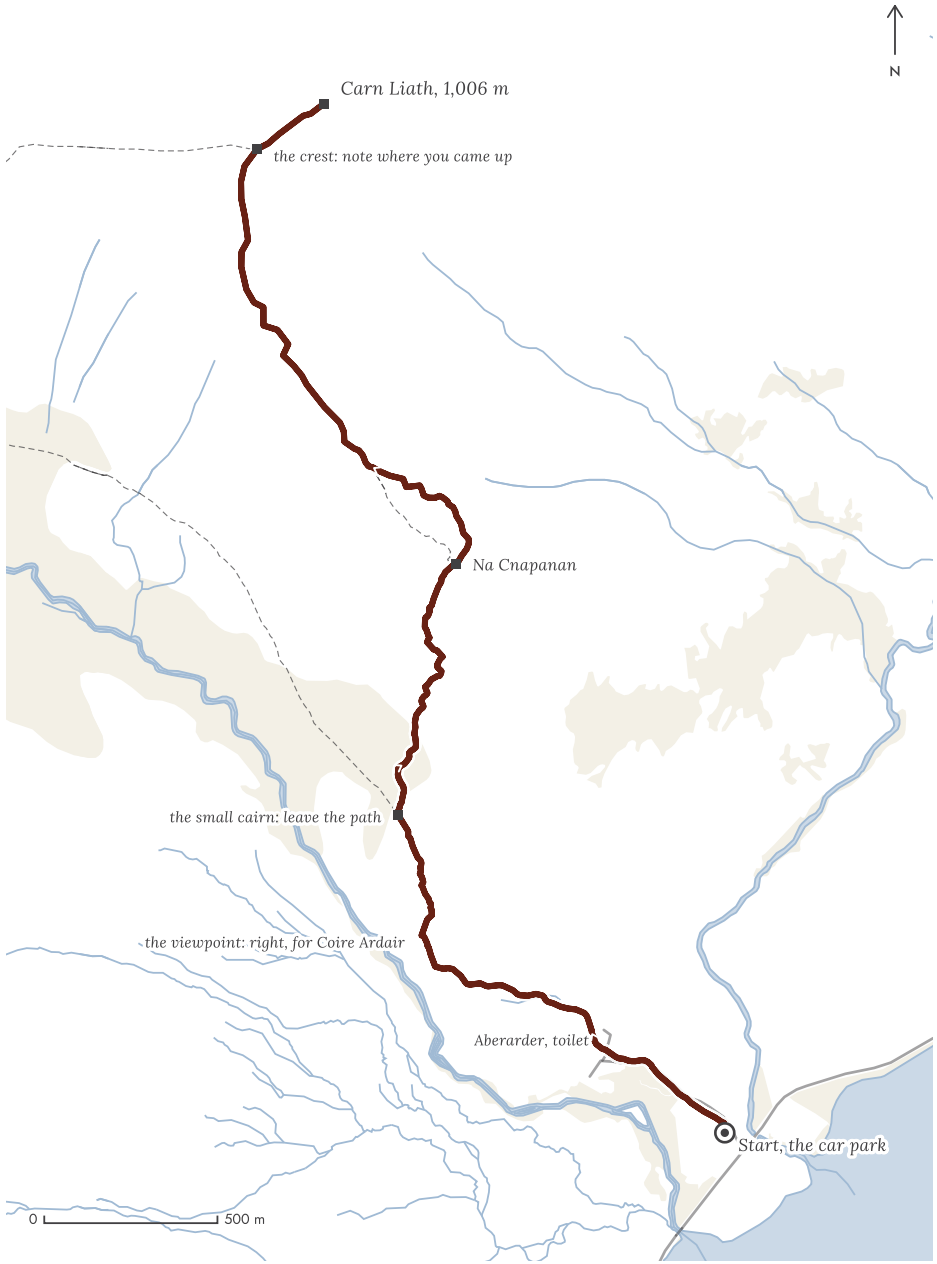
Carn Liath, 1,006 metres, is one of the three Munros of the Creag Meagaidh range, above Loch Laggan. This is its usual way up, from Aberarder through the birch wood and past Na Cnapanan to the broad summit crest, and back the same way. Steep slopes and crags fall from the crest: a day for experienced hillwalkers who can find their way with a map and compass.

words // Hidden Scotland

From the car park a gravel path leads west to the farmhouse at Aberarder. Pass round the right of the house, cross a bridge and climb stone steps by a wall to a viewpoint. Take the path right, signed for Coire Ardair, into the birch wood. About 400 metres on, by our map, a small cairn on the right marks where a faint path leaves it: a very small pile of stones, easily missed. The Coire Ardair path goes on west to Lochan a' Choire: not this walk.

The faint path climbs north through the birches. It is muddy, and after rain it can run like a stream, one guide says. Keep to it: a path that drifts left, deeper into the wood, is very hard going. Above the trees it levels out by Na Cnapanan, where steep heather slopes drop west into Coire Ardair. It bends north-east round steep ground, then climbs north-west up the long slope to the broad, stony crest about 990 metres up. If the cloud is coming down, the wind is rising or anyone is tiring, turn back before the crest.

Note where you came up onto the crest. Turn right, north-east, about 240 metres to the summit cairn. The crest path west to Meall an t-Snaim and Stob Poite Coire Ardair is not this walk. MunroMagic lists steep slopes on or near the way up and crags within a kilometre of the summit: south of the crest the ground falls steeply to the crags of Coire nan Gall and Coire Dubh. In mist careful navigation is needed from the summit, where the paths are faint, Steven Fallon warns. Come back the same way: in cloud check your line with the map and compass before you leave the summit, and again where the path leaves the crest.



Up Carn Liath from Aberarder past Na Cnapanan and back the same way: about 4 to 5 hours. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors

Fold here, the cover outwards