Before you go

No public body gives a distance or a time for this walk. By our map it is about 7.3 km (4½ miles) there and back with about 500 metres of climb, and takes about 3 to 4 hours, more with stops, in poor weather or under snow. Park in the Balsporran car park, on the hill's side of the A9, not in a lay-by: walkers who start from the lay-bys cross the A9 on foot, on the level, and it is a fast trunk road. Check Traffic Scotland for works and closed lay-bys before you travel.

Check the mountain forecast: it is often much colder and windier on the hills than in the glen. Wear good boots and carry warm, waterproof clothing, plenty of food and drink and a torch. Carry a map and compass and know how to use them, and do not rely only on a phone or GPS. Deer stalking can take place at any time of year: the first three weeks of October are the busiest, and hinds are stalked from 21 October to 15 February. Check before you go and follow any signs. Leave word of where you are going.

Under snow Geal-charn is a winter mountain, and the days are short. It needs winter skills, an ice axe and crampons that fit a rigid boot: micro spikes are not made for steeper ground. A white-out can come even on a sunny day, and on this broad top it leaves almost nothing to steer by. No avalanche forecast covers the Drumochter hills, which does not mean there is no risk.

After the walk

Go back the way you came: east-north-east across the top and down the ridge path to the track, then over the bridge and the stepping stones, and over the railway at the level crossing with the same care as before. Stop, look and listen, and if a train is coming, do not cross.

The walk online, with its film and map:
hiddenscotland.com/walks/geal-charn-from-balsporran

It starts at the Balsporran car park, just off the A9 at the Pass of Drumochter, south of Dalwhinnie, NN 627 791.

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. Mobile signal can be poor: register first by texting the word register to 999, so that you can text for help where a call will not connect. Do not rely only on a phone or GPS.

The walks, no. 134 · Facts checked 1 November 2026

HIDDEN SCOTLAND

A MUNRO WALK UP

Geal-charn



A HIDDEN SCOTLAND WALK

From Balsporran

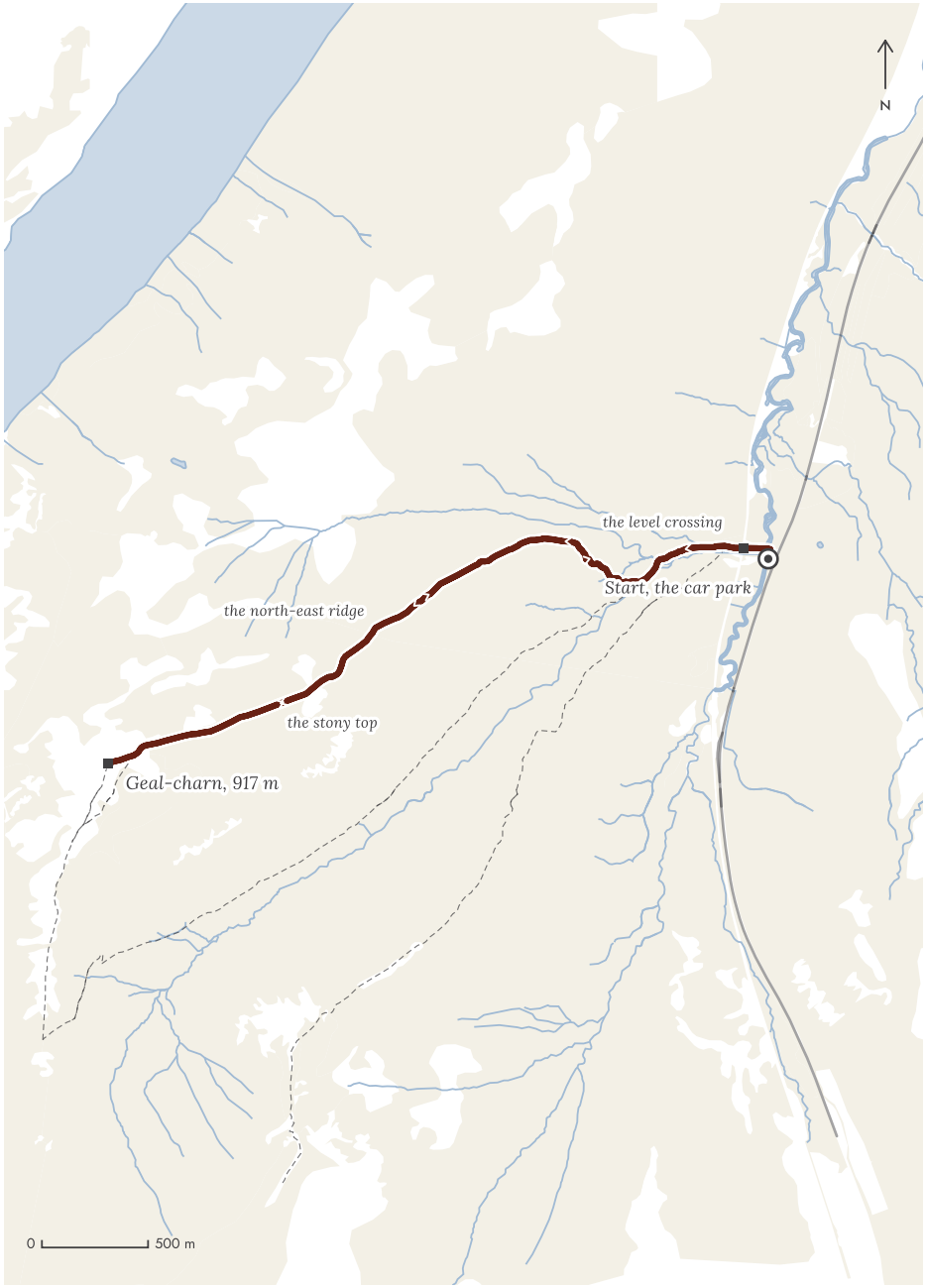
Geal-charn, 917 metres, is the most northerly of the four Munros on the west side of the Pass of Drumochter. The usual way up starts at the Balsporran car park, crosses the Highland Main Line at a level crossing, and climbs a hill track and a boggy path up the north-east ridge to a broad, stony top, and back the same way. The ground is gentle, but the railway needs care each time you cross it, and in mist the top is a day for fit, reasonably experienced hillwalkers with a map and compass.

words // Hidden Scotland

From the car park the track runs west over the River Truim and past Balsporran Cottages to the Highland Main Line. The Balsporran crossing is a private crossing its users work themselves, with gates and a telephone, on a line that carries passenger and freight trains at up to 80 miles an hour, and the sighting is poor. Stop, look and listen, and check both ways. If a train is coming, do not cross. Cross quickly and never stop on the line. Never assume it is safe because a train has just passed: another may be coming from either direction. Keep children close and dogs on a lead, check for yourself, and use no phone or headphones. If fog hides the line, use the telephone as the signs say. Close the gates behind you, and cross the railway nowhere else.

Beyond the railway the track goes west over a burn by stepping stones (if they are under water, do not cross) and a small bridge, then forks: take the right-hand branch up the hillside. It gives out into a wet, peaty path up the broad north-east ridge, and at about 840 metres onto a stony top, crossed west-south-west to the summit.

The paths south from the summit go to A' Mharconaich, not back to the car park. In mist this broad, stony top is a hard place to find your way, with its old cairns mostly gone and no waymarks or signposts: take a bearing east-north-east before you leave the summit, and if the cloud comes down or anyone is tiring, turn back. When the weather is bad it can be extremely miserable up here, WalkScotland says.



Up Geal-charn by the north-east ridge and back the same way: about 3 to 4 hours.

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