

MOFFAT HILLS CHALLENGE (MHC)

The Moffat Hills Challenge is an Anytime Challenge Walk (or Run) over the Moffat Hills in the heart of the Scottish Southern Uplands. The MHC provides excellent views of one of Southern Scotland's most impressive natural mountain landscape features, the Devil's Beef Tub, as well as the high and lonely hills surrounding Fruid Reservoir. Following a short section along the Watershed of Scotland, it offers one of the finest routes to the summit of Hart Fell, a Corbett and the region's highest and most well-known mountain. It finishes with a few miles of the deservedly popular Annandale Way long distance trail, its easy and pleasant walking allowing the tired walker/runner to wind-down after the rigours of the high mountains.

Moffat is easily reached by car, being only one mile from the M74 motorway, junction 15, about 45 minutes drive from the northern end of the M6 near Carlisle. It is also easily reached by the M74 from Glasgow and Edinburgh and the Scottish Central Belt. Bus services operate from Carlisle, Lockerbie, Dumfries, Glasgow and Edinburgh. The town is well served with hotels, B&Bs and has an excellent Camping & Caravanning Club Campsite, which is open all year. The start of the walk is near the head of the Annan Water Valley, which is accessed by a minor cul-de-sac road. This begins at the far end of one of Moffat's principle residential streets, Beechgrove, reached by bearing right (if coming from the south) at a mini roundabout at the northern end of the High Street.

The walk/run, although neither as long nor with as much ascent/descent as the Moffat Mountain Marathon (q.v.) is nevertheless a demanding one over mainly pathless and remote, uninhabited terrain in high mountain country. The landscape consists mainly of high grassy hills, but is often quite rugged underfoot. The ability to navigate accurately and safely in such country is essential, and should not be attempted by anyone without such relevant knowledge and confidence in their ability.

The route includes the ascent of one Corbett (Scottish hills above 2500ft with at least a 500ft drop on all sides) and six Donalds (2000ft and higher hills in the Scottish "Lowlands", south of the Highland Fault). The highest point reached on the MHC is 808m (2650ft), on the summit of Hart Fell, the highest of the Moffat Hills. Only three roads are encountered, two of which are narrow minor roads. Except in the first couple of kilometres and during the last two and a half kilometres, no human habitation is passed en route. The only place suitable for a small support vehicle would be in two very small parking areas on the very short section of the A701 on the route, but this is with only about seven kilometres still to go (and this could be cut short by almost 5 km if required – see below) and all easy walking at low levels, mainly on the Annandale Way long distance footpath.

The route, about 42 km (26 miles) long and with around 1750m (5700ft) of ascent and descent, should not be underestimated. It should not be attempted in conditions of dense hill fog and it is inadvisable to set out in winter conditions or when heavy

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continuous rain is forecast. Walkers must set out sufficiently early to cover the route during the hours of daylight (please be quiet in the early morning when navigating the route to the **rear** of the buildings at Corehead, so as not to disturb the inhabitants of this small community). The area is in one of the Dark Sky regions of Britain and during the winter months the days are short and the nights, when the sky is covered in thick cloud and there is no moon, are very dark indeed. Expect to encounter few or no other people and remember that help is often a long way off. Walkers are strongly advised not to attempt the route between October and March, as day length is too short during the late autumn and winter months for all but the fastest of hillwalkers or fell runners. An unplanned benightment could have serious consequences in these hills, where conditions can be severe.

Once fully committed on the walk, there is but one escape route. On reaching the dam of Fruid Reservoir, at approximately the half-way stage of the hike, the dam access road leads out of hill country to the A701 at Tweedsmuir, about 4km from the dam (not shown on Explorer 330 or Landranger 78), although there are no facilities here, nor bus service along this road. For those suffering from extreme fatigue in the last stages of the walk, it is possible to make a significant short-cut of the route when reaching NT065111, about 0.7 km after crossing the A701. Here turn left (east) to descend steeply on a track that leads to Ericstane Farm and the start of the Annandale public road. Take this road for just over half a kilometre to return to Annan Water Community Hall, the end of the MHC. This short-cut saves almost 5km of walking.

It should be unnecessary to stress that full equipment for the hills must be carried on this walk and the hillwalker must be fully self-sufficient, carrying ample food & drink

The whole route is covered by O.S. Explorer Map 330 (Moffat & St Mary's Loch) at a scale of 1:25 000. This map is recommended in preference to the 1:50 000 scale Landranger Maps, two sheets of which are required to cover the whole route, Numbers 78 and 72, although only about 1 km, around Fruid Reservoir, is on Sheet 72.

Neither badge nor certificate is available, but those who complete the route should enjoy some of the grandest scenery in the Southern Uplands of Scotland. Please let me have a brief account of your walk/run and I will keep a list of all those who successfully complete the route.

The walk/run starts and finishes at the parking area outside the Annan Water Community Hall at NT075103, about 5½ km from Moffat. Note that there is space here for no more than five cars, so it is advisable to arrive here early in the day (necessary anyway for those attempting the challenge). Note also that this parking area is not available to the public if an event is taking place at the Hall, although this is fairly rare. Cars and small vans only. Ample free parking is available in the main town car park in Moffat at NT084049, but if parking there then do be aware that about 4 km of easy walking along a riverbank path and on a minor road would be required to join the route of the MHC (at Bridgend) and this would have to be repeated at the end of this long day, to return to Moffat (no bus service up this valley - taxis are available, but would need to be booked in advance). It is also possible to park at the Borders Forest Trust car park near Corehead at NT072118, but it is not advisable for those who do not arrive in 4-wheel drive vehicles, as the track is a very rough one with numerous deep potholes. Here there is room for only about four small vehicles.

The MHC was first completed by the MHC Originator and Recorder, Alan Castle, on 25th June 2020 in a time of 13 hours 18 minutes.

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A route description is not provided, but walkers/runners must navigate between the following grid references:

Location	Kilometres	Height (m)	Grid Reference (NT)
Annan Water Community Hall	0.0	168	075103
Newton		173	074108
Ericstane		174	072110
Corehead (trail to rear of buildings)		202	073125
Top of Strait Step		420	065134
Great Hill		466	067132
Chalk Rig Edge		500	077134
Tweedhope, Annandale Way Cairn	5.8	440	084138
Whitehope Heights (D)		637	095139
Whitehope Knowe		613	097143
Edge of Deer Fence		circa 600	103142
Hart Fell (C & D, Trig No S1556)	9.8	808	113135
Hartfell Rig		739	125140
Stirk Craig		709	139146
Cape Law (D)		722	131150
Din Law (D)	14.9	667	124156
Ellers Cleuch Rig		612	126167
Garelet Dod (D)		698	126172
Common Law		649	127182
Erie Hill (D)	18.7	690	124187
Capilus Hill		524	114189
Fruid Reservoir Dam	23.5	320	089205
Muckle Dod		436	084191
Craigmaid (Trig No S6123)	27.5	553	074178
Falla Moss		485	083167
Crown of Scotland	30.9	530	081150
Killiecrane Hill		482	077152
Earlshaugh (ruin)		390	071148
Annanhead Hill (Trig No S5678)	34.1	478	058133
A701 (north side of road - AW sign)		395	055127
A701 (south side of road - AW sign)		390	058125
Ericstane Hill		437	060123
A701 (cross road)		340	060115
Bridgend (road junction)	40.2	141	074085
Annan Water Community Hall	42.1	168	075103

Abbreviations: (C)= Corbett, (D) = Donald. AW = Annandale Way.

In total: 1 Corbett, 6 Donalds and a dozen other hills. Three Trig Points are visited.

Length: 42.1km = 26.2 miles. Ascent/descent approximately 1750m (approx. 5700ft)

Alan Castle
Corehead House
Annanwater
Moffat
DG10 9LT

abcastle@madasafish.com

Please send name(s), date and time (hrs. mins) of completions.
