

## SCOTLAND

# TAKING ON THE COBBLER

Eager to find out what van life is really about, **Rob Slade** heads to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park for some Munro bagging and Corbett catching..



**N**ow, I've traditionally been a big fan of camping. It helps us get back to basics and into the country's wild spaces, especially on multi-day hikes when you are carrying everything you need on your back. But recently I've started to have a change of heart when it comes to using a tent as a base for various day hikes - why not use a campervan?

With this in mind, I was delighted to be offered the chance to try out one of Wellhouse Leisure's campervans - a Hyundai i800 conversion - courtesy of hire company Big Tree Campervans ([www.bigtreecampervans.com](http://www.bigtreecampervans.com)). So, not put off by the fact that it was October and the weather was looking the wrong side of desirable, I grabbed a mate, drove up to Scotland, picked up the van and headed to Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park. The idea was to climb a Corbett, bag a couple of Munros and make the most of having a wicked little camper for a couple of days.

We picked up the van from Perth and made the short journey west to Loch Lomond, the largest lake in Scotland. That night we wild camped in a small car park along the lake (beware of the wild camping bylaws here which mean between March and September you need to use a camp site or attain a permit to pitch up in one of the Camping Management Zones). At this point I have to say, being able to pull up and

be set for the evening is brilliant. There was no damp tent to pitch, no faffing around with sleeping bags and roll mats - it was simple, we were dry and to us it was a revelation. We're happy to report that it was also very comfortable to sleep in, setting us up perfectly for the next day.

Our first target of the weekend was Ben Lomond (974m), a popular mountain standing tall to the east of Loch Lomond that, while not the most challenging, commands spectacular views across the loch and to the peaks beyond. Of course, we didn't really get to see much of this incredible scenery because there was low cloud for the majority of the route! Still, I'm sure you'll agree that just being in the mountains is enough to make for a good day, even if it is cloudy. We ascended along the main path from Rowardennan and came down via the Ptarmigan route.

The way down was definitely more interesting than the route up and we'd thoroughly recommend doing it this way rather than returning via the same track. From the summit, the Ptarmigan route takes you over a rocky section that is pretty fun going, before meandering down and along a ridge as it descends. Halfway down this route our luck changed. The cloud disappeared and a beautiful vista was unveiled, stretching into the distance. Loch Lomond lay out before us with the sun's rays breaking through the clouds, seemingly shining a spotlight on the dozens of small islands spaced around the lake. It set up a grand finish... ▶



## THE VAN

Wellhouse Leisure is one of the UK's leading manufacturers of compact motorhomes. This award-winning company has become synonymous with modern design and excellent build quality, and sells vans direct to consumers and hire companies. We had a conversion of the Hyundai i800 and absolutely loved it. It's nippy and compact, yet has plenty of room and is equipped with anything you might need, such as two beds, a dual stove, fridge and storage. See the brand's full range of vans, including brands such as Mercedes, Ford and Toyota, at [www.wellhouseleisure.com](http://www.wellhouseleisure.com).



## HOW TO HIRE

Campervan hire is offered by many hire companies around the UK. For a week's hire of a four-berth campervan, prices typically start from around £500 per week in low season, rising to roughly £800+ per week in high season. For a list of hire companies around the UK [www.freedomtogo.co.uk/hirerent](http://www.freedomtogo.co.uk/hirerent).

After driving around the bottom of the lake and heading north, we rolled into Arrochar, our base for the night. As soon as the handbrake was locked in we were set. With the pub calling our name we had nothing to do but answer its call.

The following morning we started ascending an 884m-high Corbett named the Cobbler (otherwise known as Ben Arthur). We zig-zagged our way up the hill and left the tree line behind in no time. The track took us past a small dam on our left before we passed through the Narnain Boulders, two giant pieces of rock you have to pass through when following the track. Soon after we took a left fork when the footpath split and started to gain elevation. The steep ascent soon became rocky and at times we were even pulling ourselves up with our hands. It was tough work, but I find these types of footpaths to be some of the most enjoyable. By this point, we were well and truly among the clouds too, and visibility diminished.

With one false summit out of the way (we'll blame the cloud for that one), we made the final approach to the summit ridge

via a steep, rocky gully. Emerging out of this, we first made our way up to the north summit, half walking, half skating on the slippery rock. The exposure was impressive and there were several heart-in-mouth moments when we realised we were sliding our way along the rocky ground with huge expanses disappearing below us just a couple of steps away.

We made our way over to the south summit and stood in awe of the rock pinnacle that marks the true summit. Despite it being a wet day, we couldn't resist but to go and investigate. We carefully made our way over to the pinnacle and edged through a hole in the formation aptly named 'the eye of the needle'. On the other side we were met with a narrow ledge leading to the crux of the scramble. It was incredibly exposed (we couldn't even see the ground because of cloud) and slippery in the wet, so we took extreme care as we went. Slowly, we half scrambled, half shimmied onto the top. Our breathing was heavy and the adrenaline was pumping, but we had made it, and it felt great! Then it was just a case of getting back down... **AT**