

Lorraine McColl reaches new peaks as first woman to complete Corbetts without mechanical help – as she recovers from cancer.

A determined Scottish mountaineer is set to walk into the record books this month.

Lorraine McColl, of Inverness, has spent almost five months hiking up and down Scotland's 221 peaks known as the Corbetts.

During her epic journey, the 49-year-old will have climbed at least 14 times the height of Everest and hiked well over 1500 miles.

She has also travelled between each of the far-flung Corbetts on foot, or by bike and boat.

When Lorraine reaches the top of her final Corbett, Ben Vrackie, near Pitlochry in Perthshire, she will become the first woman to have completed a single, mechanically unaided round trip of all the Corbetts.

She said: "I never imagined how tough, both physically and mentally, this journey would be.

"I've been faced with challenging terrain, wildly different landscapes and extremely tricky weather conditions.

"My feet have taken a pounding, I have lost several toenails and I wander most hills in a semi-tired state.

"I've also worn out two pairs of walking boots and three pairs of walking shoes.

"But I have become fitter, slimmer and browner and mostly, I have been enjoying myself immensely."

The Corbetts' 221 mountains range in summit between 2500ft and 2999ft. There is a drop all around of 500ft.

The list, compiled in the 1920s by Bristolian climber John Rooke Corbett, was published posthumously by the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC).

Although less well known than the 282 3000ft Munros, the Corbetts are said to be a far harder challenge.

Lorraine should know because, in 2005, she became the first woman to complete a continuous Munros round.

She said: "Nine years ago when I walked the Munros round I thought that was challenging enough. But the Corbetts have proved even harder.

"There are more of the taller Munros but the Corbetts are far more widely spread. Their remoteness means they are harder to reach and often less walked than the Munros.

"There are fewer paths to the summits and navigation is generally more difficult."

In fact, there are Corbetts further north, south, east and west than the Munros and 11 are located on six west-coast islands.

Unlike the Munros, which feature many ridges where multiple summits can be ticked off in one day, the Corbetts are mostly singular and rarely

RELAXED Lorraine says she is enjoying the natural rhythm of walking in the beautiful Corbetts

SHOE-IN FOR A NEW RECORD

“I’ve worn out two pairs of boots and three pairs of shoes.”



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close enough together to walk several of them in a day.

In addition, Lorraine started her Corbetts journey feeling unfit.

She said: "Compared with my Munros round when I was 40, my body doesn't feel as strong or flexible.

"I guess that is just an age thing or maybe it is because I did not train that hard before setting off.

"Last year, I also underwent treatment for cancer and I have had to focus on recovery time rather than training time."

It was on April 8 that Lorraine walked her first Corbett, Cruach Innse, in Spean Bridge, Highlands.

She then headed south, bagging Corbetts across the western Highlands before taking on many of the 24 Corbetts of Perthshire and the dozen or so around Loch Lomond.

After the six Corbetts in Dumfries and Galloway, Lorraine hiked to the Corbetts on the islands of Arran, Jura, Mull, Arisaig, Rum, Skye and Harris.

Many more days of walking and cycling brought Lorraine to the

Corbetts of the north-west Highlands.

Her final 20 or so Corbetts are to the east of Scotland and she hopes to reach the end of her journey by August 24.

She said: "Reaching the top of the first Munro felt like a milestone after all I had been through with my illness last year and the huge amount of logistical planning involved.

"I loved the Corbetts on the islands and the magical experience of travelling between them by boat.

"I have also discovered some new favourite hills, including Sgurr an Airgid at Glen Shiel, Beinn na h-Eaglaise above Arnisdale and Ben Aden in Knoydart. And the five hills just south of Glenfinnan were superb."

Lorraine said she had been worried about Scotland's famous biting midges.

She said: "I was dreading July for the midges but a combination of high camp grounds, bothies and lots of sunshine kept them at bay.

"I have been really lucky with the weather overall, we have had a fairly good Scottish summer."

Lorraine has relied on friends and her



REMOTE
Ben Vrackie in
Perthshire

