



The West Highland Way
by Belinda Knox





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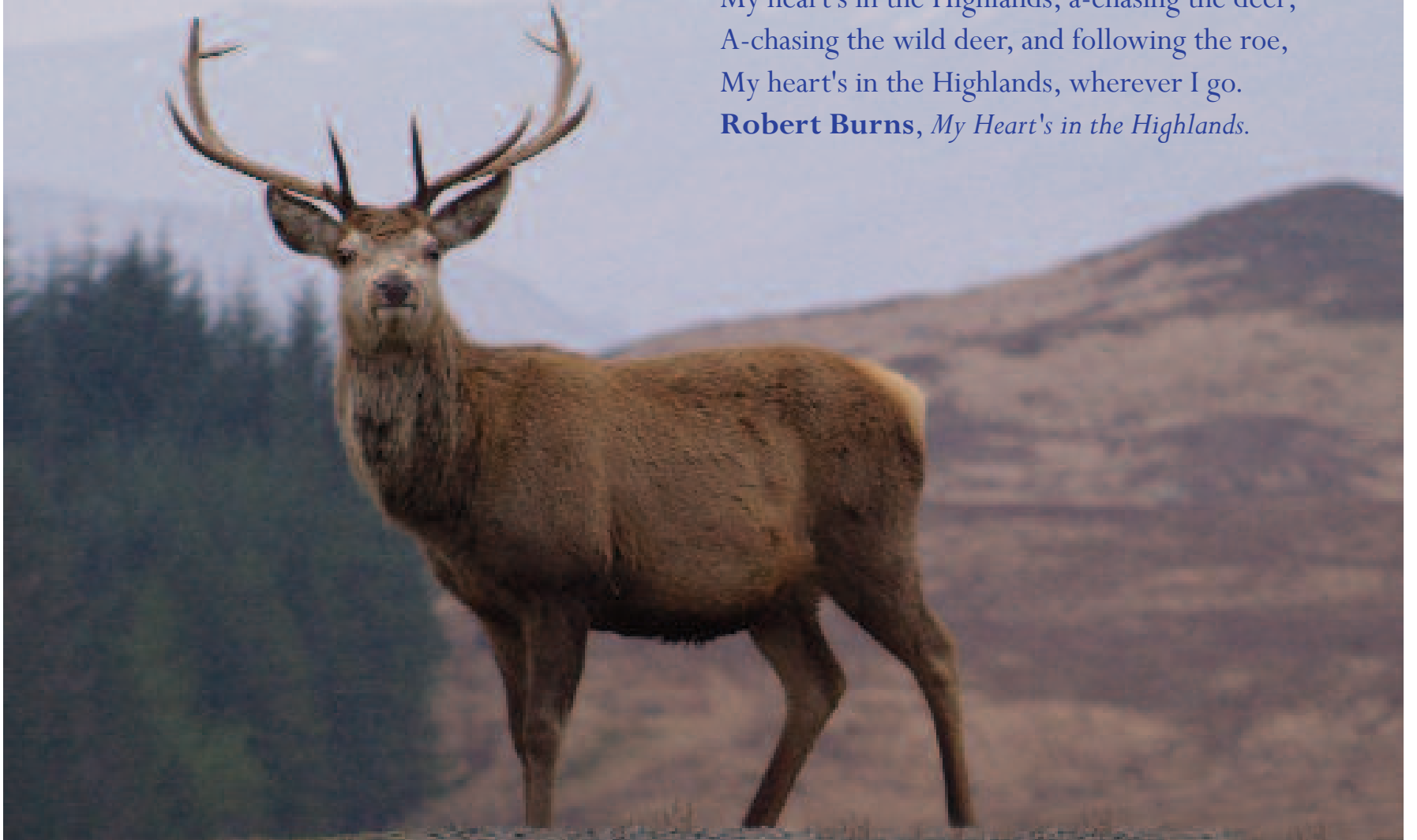
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Kneading People

INTRODUCTION

My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,
My heart's in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer;
A-chasing the wild deer, and following the roe,
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go.

Robert Burns, *My Heart's in the Highlands*.



Lord of all he surveys. The monarch of the West Highland Way.

Few who have travelled the length of The West Highland Way would disagree with these romantic sentiments expressed by Scotland's greatest poet. Without doubt the journey of almost 100 miles takes you through some of the most beautiful and dramatic scenery in the British Isles.

Winding its way from the outskirts of the great bustling city of Glasgow to the foot of mighty Ben Nevis, the rugged path is guaranteed to make the heart beat faster.

Passing the deep, dark waters of Loch Lomond and skirting the brooding peaks of Glencoe the intrepid hiker can't help but feel a sense of wonder. The awe-inspiring countryside is at times brooding and menacing, and at others enchanting and majestic. Terrible tales of betrayal and bloody battles still haunt the Way and echo mournfully down the centuries. Indeed, the history of the Highlands is as wild as the wind that suddenly sweeps the birch and heather-clad hillsides, moaning across desolate Rannoch Moor and bringing heavy rain to buffet the many boulder

strewn burns along the track. The savage terrain, softened over time in places by a cloak of brown earth and verdant greenery bears witness to the frightening power of mother nature. A gargantuan glacial rub-a-dub here, a titanic tectonic shove there and hey presto - Scotland The Very Brave was born. The locals are a tough and independent breed with a strong sense of kinship. Used to sheltering strangers from the storms, their welcome is as warm as the sun that surely follows the showers – a pot of golden tea and scones

at the end of the rainbow. Thanks to a wealth of wildlife, weary travellers these days can look forward to fine food in even the most remote and modest surroundings as well as a warm cosy bed.

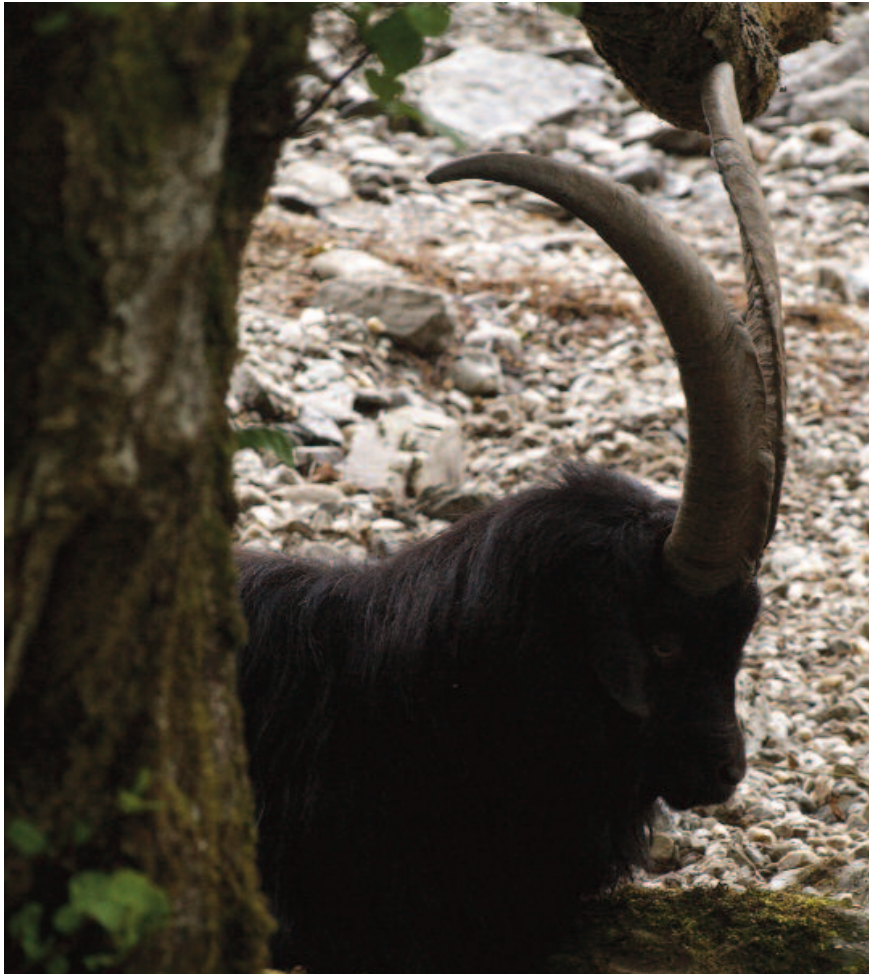
An early start can be a pleasure too. Fired by a bowl of porridge and a beautiful sunrise, much is possible. And at the end of the Way there is the chance to view the biggest, most famous Ben of them all – Nevis.



Summer sunrise over Conic Hill from Loch Lomondside.



MYTH AND MYSTERY



Devilish horns and cloven hooves. Wild sheep alongside the path.

Whether you take the high road or the low road to the Highlands you will be following in the footsteps of some of the wildest characters and the weirdest creatures ever to have graced or disgraced the pages of Scottish history. As spirits are raised by a spell of fine weather and the superb scenery, it's almost inevitable that hikers will be tempted to whistle or sing that famous refrain "O ye'll take the high road and I'll take the low road, And I'll be in Scotland afore ye..." Reputedly a mournful farewell composed by one of Bonnie Prince Charlie's men,

condemned to die in Carlisle jail after the 1745 rising, it contains within the poignant chorus a prediction that he will take the spirit path or "low road" from the gallows to his beloved Scotland and reach there sooner than a fellow rebel who, although free, would have to take the slower earthly "high road." The words of the ancient song reveal the strong Highland beliefs and bonds that have given rise over the centuries to many strange stories. Along with heroic legends of men of destiny like Rob Roy and Robert the Bruce are told mythical tales of friendly fairy folk and cruel demons.

The ballad also sings the praises of lovely Loch Lomond. In 1921 the English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, a keen collector of folk music from around the British Isles, arranged the song for an unaccompanied four-part male voice choir with baritone solo. As anyone who has walked the West Highland Way will readily testify the banks are indeed "bonnie" and there are choices between low and high roads. Lomond is Britain's biggest body of inland water and one of the longest lochs – stretching for 23 miles. Through a network of pipes it quenches the thirst of much of Scotland and plunges at one point to a depth of over 620 feet.

However, be warned, the dark waters are no place for the unwary. If, while strolling along the shore, you should come across a lone white pony with a dripping mane and flaring nostrils don't be taken for a ride. It might be an evil water spirit called a Kelpie. Once on the creature's back, it is said the ice cold skin becomes sticky. Tales are told of youngsters being stuck fast and unable to escape as they are carried to the bottom of the loch and devoured. One boy who was foolish enough to stroke a Kelpie's nose had to cut off his own finger to escape. Hollywood, of course, has put a more sympathetic gloss on the legend. In *The Water Horse* movie a child is befriended by a sea ser-



A spooky combination of mist over the water and reflected clouds gives Loch Lomond an air of mystery.

pent with more than a passing resemblance to the popular image of Nessie, The Loch Ness Monster. There are also sad stories of beautiful Scottish mermaids called Selkies. Legend has it they were often forced to marry lonely

farmers who stole and hid their seal-like skins when they shed them to sunbathe.

Loch Lomond has some 38 islands which have, in times past, provided a safe haven for rebels on the run. One of these is known as Inchcailloch and, when viewed from afar, is said to resemble a body lying on its back. Its graveyard plays host to members of the notorious MacGregor clan, who rode forth from their lochside strongholds to strike terror into the hearts of many a hapless lowland farmer. Expert cattle rustlers, they quickly refined the dark art into an industry worthy of the modern day mafia by demanding protection money.

Most famous of them all was dashing Rob Roy. He was given the surname because of his flaming locks. It comes from the Gaelic 'ruadh'. While poor clansmen who benefitted from his largesse saw him as a Scottish Robin Hood, his victims branded him a robbing brigand. Although opinion was divided about his methods few could doubt his

success. In the years leading up to 1711 he became a big cattle baron through stealing, dealing and droving - the future looked very bright. Then, suddenly, his world crashed. In one fell swoop his head stockman ran off with £1,000 and two men who owed him a large amount of money also vanished. The cash, a fortune in those days, was to fund a livestock bonanza. Severely out of pocket, his patron, The Duke of Montrose, was not amused. Furious, he had Rob Roy declared bankrupt and then, for good measure, outlawed. It didn't end there though. The Duke's men kicked his wife and family out of their home and burned it to the ground. Thus the legend of Rob Roy was born.



Strong, broad shouldered and cunning as a fox, he headed off into the heather and survived by making audacious raids against his former friend, the Duke. According to folklore there are two rocky lochside boltholes on the West Highland Way used by the renegade. One, The Prison, is just north of Ptarmigan Lodge and reputedly held kidnap victims awaiting ransom. The other is beyond Inversnaid and has been dubbed simply, Rob Roy's Cave. Hidden among a jumble of huge boulders it is hard to get to and requires some agility. (pictured here- the subtle

sign reveals the tiny entrance). While it's not certain he ever used it in real life, it would have made an excellent refuge.

Although he survived to die peacefully in his bed, one can't help wondering if Rob Roy may have upset the Sidhe – gaelic for fairy folk. Back in the mists of time they were said to have been driven underground and into another dimension after losing an epic battle against warriors from Spain. Although they often offer help to mortals, they fiercely guard their fairy hills, like Scheihallion near Rannoch, mushroom rings and specially chosen hawthorn trees, lochs and woods. Anyone damaging these sacred sites or speaking ill of the Sidhe can be cursed.

Rob Roy is not the only famous name associated with his cave. According to legend Robert the Bruce hid among the giant stones too. The then King of Scotland was on the run in 1306 following defeat at the battle of Dalrigh on the outskirts of Tyndrum. His fortunes had certainly hit rock bottom. In a matter of months he had gone from being crowned at Scone to being a fugitive fleeing his enemies. According to legend he took refuge in the cave after two major defeats. The first by the English at Methven near Perth and the second by the Macdougalls at Dalrigh. The bloody ambush was revenge for the murder, by Bruce, of John "the Red" Comyn, a nephew of the clan chief and a rival to the throne. The king was lucky to escape with his life. Whilst fleeing on horseback he was set upon by three men who had sworn to kill him or die in the attempt.



A stone seat on the outskirts of Tyndrum marks the site of the epic battle of Dalrigh, 1306.

Showing the strength and nerve that took him to power he slew them all in quick succession. During the struggle he lost the famous Brooch of Lorn – torn from his plaid cloak and found clutched in the hand of one of the dead. This ornate trophy is now jealously guarded by the clan Macdougall.

Hikers on the West Highland Way pass the small lochan outside Tyndrum where Bruce is reputed to have flung his mighty broad sword to prevent it being taken by his attackers. It may be that, during his time in the cave by Loch Lomond he sought the help of the Drow, elves famed for their metalwork, to fashion a new magical blade. It would certainly have helped his return to glory. Soon he was back on top and powerful enough to crush the MacDougalls. Fairies, it is said, come in different guises. An ugly washerwoman is sometimes seen by a stream rinsing blood from the clothes of the doomed. If a passing mortal asks politely she will reveal the name of those who are about to

die. It is entirely possible such a harbinger might have been spotted in Glencoe on February 12, 1692. Trekkers heading along the Way are certainly struck by the brooding nature of the rugged landscape at this point. Although second sight is a gift much prized and feared in Scottish folklore, the MacDonalds seemed blind to any omens and powerless to avoid a dark date with destiny. Early next morning 38 of the clan were killed by troops. Another 40 women and children perished from the cold after their homes were burned in what has become known as the infamous Massacre of Glencoe.

The slaughter took place after 120 soldiers under the command of Captain Robert Campbell arrived in the Glen to collect tax. It was all smiles as they accepted the food and

shelter offered by the MacDonalds – a Highland tradition. Perhaps, due to the sudden influx of men, no room or food was left by the fire for the Brownie. According to tradition a house elf can be treacherous when crossed. They usually help with chores, but wreak havoc when offended. In modern times the name was adopted by the famous guide movement for little girls and a grumpy version, Dobbie, appeared in JK Rowling's Harry Potter books and films. Certainly the omens were not good. Treachery was afoot. New orders handed to Capt Campbell and approved by King William of Orange called on him to 'fall upon the rebels, the Macdonalds of Glencoe and put all to the sword under 70.' Although related to the clan chief by marriage the Captain was ordered to



The buds of this pine tree take on a supernatural air.



Desolate Rannoch Moor through the ruined window of an old hunting lodge.

make doubly sure Alistair Maclain did not survive. He was killed by two officers while struggling to get out of bed. The official excuse for the massacre was to punish the MacDonalds for being late in swearing allegiance to the King. But by any standards it was a brutal act and in Scottish law murder under trust is regarded more seriously than murder.

An inquiry by the Scottish Parliament blamed the Secretary of State for Scotland, John Dalrymple, and called for punishment and compensation, but the King himself was exonerated and nothing much was done. Although it was actually planned and executed by the government, it is seen as a grisly chapter in an ancient clan feud. One Glen-

coe pub, just off the West Highland Way, *The Clachaig*, still has a sign on the door saying ‘No Hawkers or Campbells.’ Two survivors of the massacre escaped to Ireland and changed their names to McKern. This branch of the clan then spread to Argentina and Australia. The late actor Leo McKern was a descendant.

A walk along the Way is certainly a magical affair, you never know who or what you might meet. However, if a black cat with a white breast patch rubs against your leg - be kind. It could be a witch with supernatural powers. According to Scottish tradition there are also fairy dogs too. One, a grim reaper, is reputed to be as big as a cow with green, shaggy fur and a long braided tail. ❖

GEOLOGY

The ground under your feet as you walk along The Way and the peaks that loom large on the horizon give no hint of the violent events that gave rise to their evolution. Whether clothed in green grass, black peat, snow or shattered rock, the land appears solid and eternal. However this wasn't always the case. Where the route begins in the Clyde Valley layers of red sandstone were blown apart by violent volcanic eruptions spewing layers of lava across the landscape to form the now familiar Kilpatrick Hills and Campsie Fells. When the Way reaches unassuming



Conic Hill other mighty forces have been hard at work. This time the irresistible power of two of the tectonic plates that make up the surface of the planet collide, forming the Highland Boundary fault. The harder rocks of northern Scotland are slowly winning this titanic scrum pushing the softer southern layers back and upwards. From the top of the hill the ridge appears as a line of islands across Loch Lomond. Through this geological battlefield ploughed an ice age glacier carving out a deep trough that later filled up with water to become Britain's biggest natural inland reservoir. To the north of Conic Hill there is more evidence of the volcanic eruptions which formed the granite bastions, like Ben Nevis, that make up much of the Highlands and the glaciers that helped rasp out famous valleys like Glen Coe and the underlying surface of boggy Rannoch Moor.



L to R

The collapse of this road near Drymen shows the power of water erosion to shape the land.

Lush black peat laid down over centuries offers a fertile home for plants.

View from Conic Hill over the islands of the Highland Boundary Fault.

From volcanoes come the munroes... The mountains on the path near Glencoe.



FLORA AND FAUNA



The rugged landscape of the highlands, regularly pounded by the elements, would, at first sight, appear to be too hostile for most wildlife. But, as you travel along the way, your eyes and ears quickly become attuned to a wide variety of flora and fauna. The most magnificent sight is that of the mature stag with his mighty crown of antlers. In the autumn, the glens echo to the throaty braying of these male red deer as they compete for the attentions of the hinds. Next in line are the highland cattle with their shaggy coats, long horns and adorable calves. Accustomed to braving the foulest of weather, they seem to symbolise Scottish stoicism. Often seen throughout the highlands too are the tough sheep which graze the fields and dot the craggy hillsides. They seem unphased by the wind, rain or snow as they nibble the coarse pastures accom-



Above: Dressed to chill..Clad in green moss this ancient tree is well protected against the elements.

Below: Aromatic drifts of white wild garlic add both scent and scenery.



panied by their attentive offspring. Lucky rambblers may even catch sight of a glorious golden eagle with its mighty wings outstretched on the wilder sections of the way or startle a red grouse hiding in the heather. As you near Glen Nevis on the final stretch of the path it is likely you will come across a cheeky chaffinch or two begging for titbits among the wilderness of pine stumps and abandoned timber left by loggers. The highland woodlands also provide a refuge for the beleaguered red squirrel - driven out of much of Britain by its more aggressive cousin, the grey. It is quite possible to catch a fleeting glimpse of those trade mark tufted ears, fluffy tails and auburn coats among the tree tops. As well as heather, the hillsides and sheltered bonnie banks are home to a surprising number of flowers - in spring much of the way is fringed with bluebells, ferns and wild white carpets of garlic. In summer foxgloves also reach upwards towards the sun. Even the boggy stretches can come alive with bobbing white balls of fluffy cotton grass among the beds of reeds. Whether looking down at the path or up at the sky you cannot help but be impressed by nature's beauty. ✦



Above: A red grouse scurries away through the heather.

Below left: White cotton grass heads dance in the breeze above a bog.

Below right: Purple flowers framed by spiny green leaves. The celebrated Scottish thistle takes a bow.







THE ROUTE

Surprisingly The West Highland Way, with all its wild, natural beauty, starts very close to the heart of Scotland's busiest city, Glasgow. A short drive or train ride will quickly bring you to Milngavie on the northern edge of the suburban sprawl. A welcome gateway to the countryside for urbanites, the town, with its three castle ruins, is part of the old earldom of Lennox,

which passed through many hands during Scotland's turbulent history, including the Darnley Stewarts (The murdered Lord Henry was briefly married to Mary Queen of Scots). Before becoming popular with modern-day commuters, Milngavie (pronounced 'Mull-guy') owed much of its success to the textile industry – particularly for the bleaching of cloth. Now it welcomes travellers as they stock up on necessities for the long trek up to Fort William. Standing alongside a bridge over the Allander Water in Douglas Street, a big granite obelisk marks the start of the Way. Or, if you want to linger for a little longer, a metal bench announces in bold letters across its back the



beginning of the walk.

The route passes behind the shops and heads out into the countryside via an old railway cutting, a babbling brook, moorland and mossy Mugdock Wood. As you skirt Craiggallian Loch, infamous for big bonfire gatherings during the depressed 30's, the landscape slowly begins to look more rugged as the hunched shape of Dumgoyne Hill appears on the horizon. There is more evidence too of the need for Glasgow city folk to get away from all the hustle and bustle. Carbeth hillside is dotted with quaint wooden huts built in the forties as holiday homes. On a clear day the view ahead is full of Highland promise. The moody mountains on the skyline include Ben Ledi and Ben Lomond. The surrounding fertile fields are still owned by the Edmonstone family, who were granted the land by James I in 1434. Before reaching the distinctive tree-covered cone of Dumgoyach, an extinct volcano, the Way passes close to five large Neolithic stones standing on a ridge. By climbing to these you can view turreted Duntreath Castle - straight from the pages of a fairytale.

Next stop is the old Blane Valley railway line, opened back in the late 1880's for rich Glasgow commuters – who, unfortunately, failed to materialise. Now, instead of passengers, the disused track carries the West Highland Way for four miles and, underground, the big water pipe from Loch Lomond to much of Scotland. Few can resist a visit to the Glengoyne distillery with it's huge, gleaming copper stills. The unpeated whisky it has produced for over 100 years is highly prized. It's here you can raise a glass to local hero, the late wartime Deputy Supreme Commander in Europe and Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Lord Tedder - born close-by.



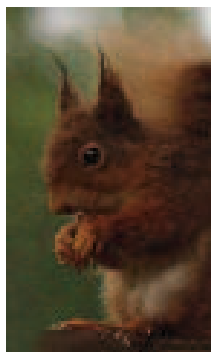
Just a short walk further along the Way, by the Beech Tree Inn, lies Moss Farm, the birthplace of another influential historical figure: the strict Protestant tutor to James VI of Scotland and I of England, George Buchanan. After the red sandstone hamlet of Gartness the route takes in another old railway, the Forth and Clyde junction line, Charles Gulland's curious wooden camping wigwams at Easter Drumquhassle and the welcoming village of Dry-



men, once home to comedy legend, Billy Connolly.

Many opt for a pleasant night at the Buchanan Arms - if you happen to be there when there is a wedding, a piper will be piping you on your journey in the morning. It's up, up and away as the ancient military road, (now the A811), constructed following the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, leads out into the countryside. Ahead lies Conic Hill (358m), after the gaelic A'Coinneach - meaning peaty marsh. Before that looms the Garadhban Forest, 1300 acres

looked after by the Forestry Commission and home to interesting birdlife and red squirrels. In recent times some of the trees have been felled. The look of the surrounding countryside is largely down to the Dukes of Montrose who held sway from the 1750's until the 1920's and did much to improve the woods and pastures. Then you head over moorland and across two bridges, the second over the Burn of Mar, a pleasant



picnic spot among trees. Although the path skirts the summit, it's worth climbing to the top of Conic Hill. On a clear day the views are splendid, particularly across the islands of Loch Lomond - Inchcailloch to Inchmurrin - marking the Highland Boundary Fault. A steep descent follows into pretty, Balmaha, with its bobbing boats. Thought to be named after a contemporary of St. Patrick, the lochside bay boasts St. Maha's 'healing' well nearby. The remains - a shallow trough surrounded by stones and overlooked by a small obelisk - can still be seen.



It is here that the Way and Loch Lomond come together and remain close for about 20 miles. Regarded as one of the most beautiful stretches of water in the UK, it is hardly surprising it was included in Scotland's first National Park in 2002. Climbing out of the bay to Craigie Fort plateau, the sight of the wide, shallow southern half of the loch contrasts strongly with the narrow, deep, northern section ahead. The route descends to the loch again, before twisting and turning through woodland, including part of the 42,000 acre Queen Elizabeth Forest Park. As you pass Anchorage Cottage there is a chance to gaze upon Inchlon-aig island, famous for supplying Robert the Bruce's army with yew longbows. The lochside oak too was long harvested for building houses, ships, smelting iron and tanning leather. In the bay below Coille Mhor it is sometimes possible to see what's left of an Iron Age crannog settlement, an 'island' made of large stones and wood, linked to the land by a secret underwater causeway. After picking your way among shoreline boulders you eventually reach

the Rowardennan Hotel – start of the path up Ben Lomond (974m), Scotland’s most southerly Munro. The next part of the Way passes by Rob Roy’s Prison. Across the loch can be seen Ben Arthur, the Cobbler, a climber’s favourite, and the shallow pass between Loch



Lomond and Loch Long, once used by Vikings, who dragged their longboats through to pillage the islands. The Way also passes the Rowchoisch bothy, restored in memory of Glaswegian outdoor legend, William Ferris, who formed the Rucksack Club, a forerunner of the Scottish Youth Hostel Association. The forest track then becomes a path descending to the shore and eventually reaches Inversnaid with the enchanting Snaid Burn waterfall (*pictured left*) and its hotel, situated in the one place on the eastern shore of Lomond where the land dips low enough to allow a road in from Aberfoyle. Continuing along The Way the path becomes rugged, weaving it’s way up and down and in and out of boulders, trees and bracken. The innocent sign pointing to Rob Roy’s Cave belies the difficulty of getting to it over a jumble of huge fallen rocks by the water. You can’t mistake the actual crevice – the word CAVE has been painted alongside it. Robert the Bruce, is also said to have hidden there in 1306 following a defeat in battle.

After passing an island known as Ylenow, a former MacFarlane stronghold, there is a dramatic bridge over a waterfall, which heralds the end of the strenuous section. The Way opens out along the open shoreline, passes over a stream flowing into the bay, up over a hill to Doune Farm, now rebuilt as a bothy shelter, and down to Ardleish, where a ferry to Ardlui on the other shore can be hailed by hoisting a novel orange buoy up a flag pole. It’s worth the trip just to glimpse the exotic wild peacocks that have colonised the area. Pressing on though, you soon arrive at the Ben Glas Burn and the remains of a farm. Here, by the bridge, the water tumbles dramatically over a set of falls, best viewed from the nearby A82 road. Close by too is the legendary Drivers’ Inn at Inverarnan, a famous climber’s haunt. Its eccentric mix of stuffed creatures, oddball memorabilia and relaxed style is a must for any passers-by.

Heading north your close companion is the River Falloch. Behind Bienglas Farm the Way climbs out of the Loch Lomond dip, moving steadily through Glen Falloch's picturesque blend of moorland, trees and fields. All the while the river rushes, gurgles and splashes over a series of rocky hurdles and in and out of both wild and tranquil pools. A delightful timpani. Looking down from Cruachan Cruinn is the ancient stone of the Britons. Back in the mists of time the Scots, Picts and Britons regarded it as the border between their lands. The Way also passes historic pine trees, a faint reminder of the old Caledonian Forest that

once dominated the central Highlands. After the Derrydaroch bridge you pass under the West Highland railway line by a tunnel that looks as though it was made for fairy-folk. The 'cattle creep' is hard going if you are carrying a pack. An old military road, then takes you to Crianlarich – midpoint on The Way, a mecca for fledgling Munro baggers and a vital bus and rail hub.

Suitably refreshed walkers are ready to enjoy the pleasant and historically exciting journey up Strath Fillan to Tyn-drum. Away from the military road it passes through forested valley slopes crosses the River Fillan and takes in

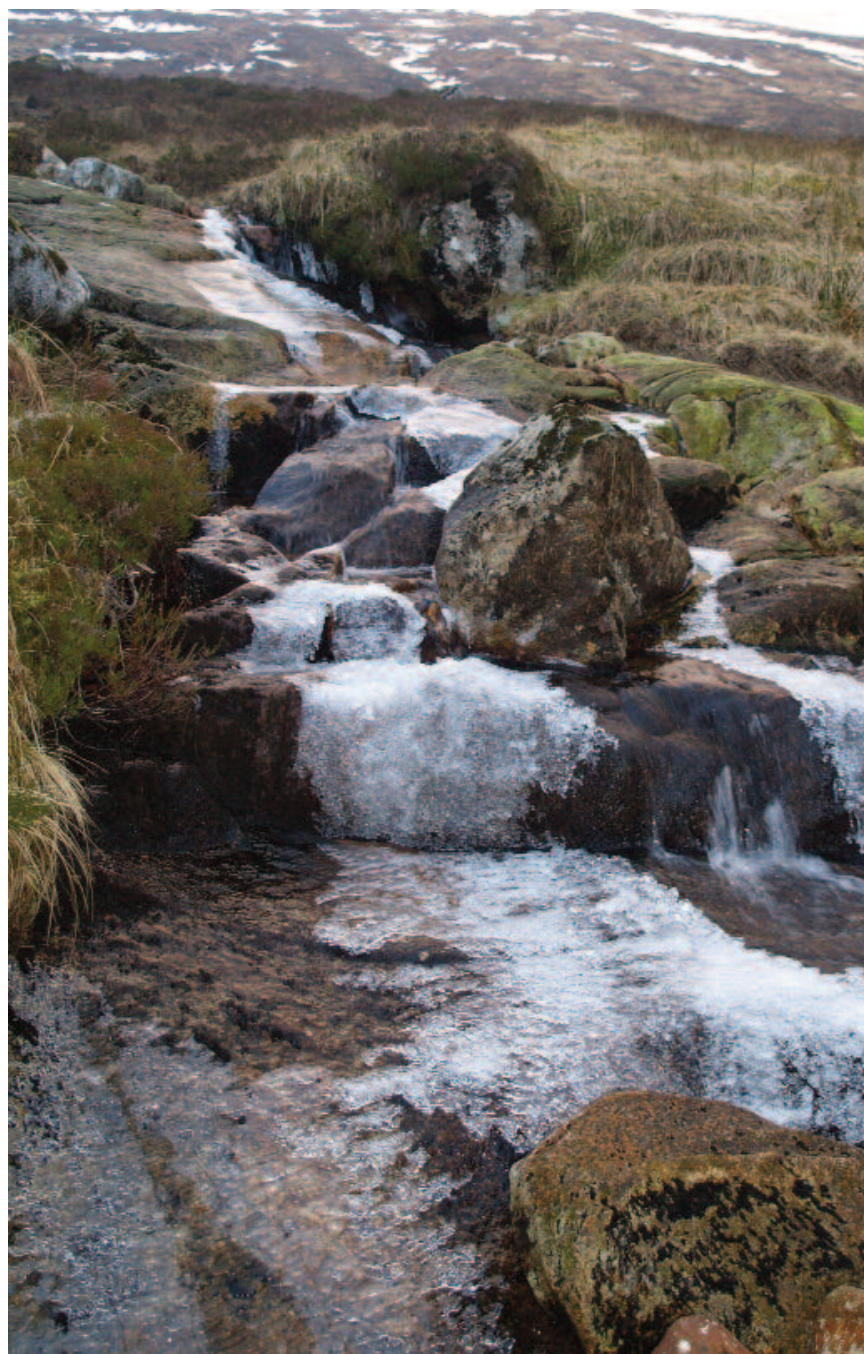


the now familiar blend of farmland and moor. Highlights include the remnants of St. Fillan's Chapel by Kirkton Farm. The monk died in 734 AD, but was venerated by successive kings of Scotland. As custodians of his talismanic relics, the Dewar family were given land and special status. Also, closer to Tyndrum, the lochan where Robert The Bruce is said to have thrown his mighty broadsword rather than let it fall into the hands of his enemies and Dalrigh, The King's Field, where he was ambushed in 1306 by the MacDougalls and forced to flee, heroically fighting off three attackers in one astonishing feat of horsemanship and brute strength. By Clifton village there is also a bleak area of bare riverbank – testament to the lead mining industry that once thrived in the area.

Tyndrum, the cattle droving centre of yesteryear is now full of herds of tourists in the summer. The Way out is through a pass into Glen Orchy. Dodging under the railway via another low tunnel, the road continues in the shadow of three big peaks, Beinn Dorain, Bienn Odhar and Beinn a'Chaisteil, which dwarf the curving railway with its viaducts making them look like part of a toy train set. At Auch the route goes over the Allt Chonoglas via a battered old bridge and onwards to the famous Bridge of Orchy (*pictured left*), its hamlet and busy hotel.

A few paces further on, The Way, sticking to the old military road, heads up through trees to a splendid viewpoint on Ben Inverveigh that, on a good day, reveals the approach to desolate Rannoch Moor, (*see right*), described by Robert Louis Stevenson in his famous book *Kidnapped* as “a wearier desert a man never saw,” the surrounding Blackmount Forest and, below, Loch Tulla with Black Mount lodge on the shoreline. It is then a short downhill stroll to the snug hotel at Inveroran. An inn has stood on this wild, remote spot for over 200 years. Once used by drovers it later became famous in the 1890s as a base for winter

climbing. Not a place to linger too long in the summer months as the dreaded midges are voracious. Heading away from the hotel in the morning you are likely to see some of the deer that frequent the lochside. Prayers are usually offered up for good weather on the next stretch of The Way as there is precious little shelter from the elements as you cross the edge of bleak Rannoch Moor, notorious for rain - unforgettable if you get caught in it. Onwards past Forest Lodge, an old haunt of deerstalkers nestling among pines, the route goes upwards revealing



some superb scenery and, in summer, the chance to see pretty bog plants and flowering heather. Steady walking brings you eventually to the bridge over the River Ba, then up past ruined Ba Cottage to a summit which gives a fine view of the moor and the approach to Glen Coe.

Close by is a simple cairn erected in loving memory of the journalist and adventurer Peter Fleming, brother of James Bond creator Ian. Peter suffered heart failure in 1971 while out hunting nearby. Next stop must surely be one of the best placed hotels in the whole of the UK – The Kingshouse. It is a good place to relax and rest before tackling the Devil's Staircase. This looms ahead as you enter Glen Coe. Despite the fearsome name it is not as steep or exposed as it sounds. From Altnafeadh the path zig zags up to the highest point on The Way (550m). After a pause for reflection, head down the other side towards Kinlochleven.

It's not long before the Blackwater Dam comes into view. Hand built in the early 1900s by hard-working, hard-drinking labourers, it formed a 13km stretch of reservoir and provided the source of hydro-electric power for the aluminium smelter at Kinlochleven. Supplies were sent from the town to the work site by an overhead bucket suspended on a rope. Further along the track the big metal pipes appear, taking water from the dam down to the town. Sometimes the combination of immense water pressure and a small hole will produce a novel fountain (*pictured below*). As you enter the Leven Valley the scenery changes from bleak moorland to tree-lined slopes. You are literally piped into Kinlochleven as the track runs alongside the six steel tubes down to the old aluminium works. Although the settlement owes its size to the smelter, it has shut and outdoor pursuits now provide an income for the





locals. As well as an indoor climbing centre the town also has a popular brewery. Those who need to rest before heading for Fort William can try Mamore Lodge hotel, once frequented by royalty. Perched high on the hillside above the town it forms a good jumping off point for the rest of the route. Strolling away from the Lodge in the early morning you emerge out of the pine trees and head into the eerie Lairigmor glen, with the famous Mamores to the right and Beinn na Callich and Mam na Gualainn to the left. It seems like a lost valley with tumbled down ruins adding to the feeling of a place that time forgot. Eventually The Way bears right off the old military road and heads down towards a plantation. Trees alongside the track were recently felled for timber. The process is awesome. Powerful machines on caterpillar tracks grab hold

of the trunks, cut, strip and stack them in trailers as easily as a child would sharpen a pencil. They leave hurricane like devastation in their wake. It is not a pretty sight and only relieved by lovely Lochan Lunn Da Bhra which soon appears on the left, with it's lonesome pines. There are a number of legends attached to this remote stretch of water. One is that Macbeth met his end in an island castle. On the way into Glen Nevis the path passes the airy ancient iron age fort of Dun Deardail, an excellent place to take a good long look at the biggest Ben of all (*pictured above*). All you need is stamina, warm clothing and good weather, (the latter having defeated us many times). Eventually The Way turns right and joins the main road through Glen Nevis. Onwards to the big sign by the Bridge of Nevis, which says it all "The End Of The West Highland Way – Congratulations!"



THE WAY AHEAD

If one word sums up the immense feeling of relief enjoyed by the city dweller during the long journey along TheWay, it is carved on a plaque embedded in the path through mossy MugdockWood near Milngavie. 'Breathe' says it all. While walking, you quickly establish a gentle rhythm, taking in lungfuls of fresh Highland air. With every step you feel more alive and in touch with your senses. The stepping stone (below) and curving ornamental gate (pictured right) were designed by Aberdeen artist Mary Bourne to celebrate the millenium. Ancient MugdockWood, with the famous old oaks and Spring bluebells, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and has appeared on maps dating back to the 1600's. It is now part of a country park, given to the people of Glasgow by Sir Hugh Fraser in 1980.





As the famous old song by Harry Dacre puts it: 'you'll look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle made for two.' It's as true today as in 1892 when the lyrics were first published, if the couple pictured bottom right are anything to go by. They cut quite a dash powering along The Way on a rugged modern 'mountain' tandem specially built to withstand the rigours of the Highland weather and terrain. Although The Way is most suited to walkers, responsible cyclists are welcome. A few common sense do's and don'ts ensure peace and harmony prevails. Do go properly equipped for remote and demanding countryside and dismount on narrow, rocky sections when encountering others. Some parts of The Way are particularly tricky for riders. Crossing under the A82 and the West Highland railway line can be difficult.

The distinctive wooded mound of Dumgoyach, a basalt volcanic basalt plug that survived ice age erosion, looms over Craigallian Loch on The Way to Drymen.

