

Walker's Britain: The Great Glen Way

Tour code: WGL

Revised: October 08

Three hundred and eighty million years ago, northwest Scotland was joined to parts of Greenland and Northern Norway. Plate Tectonics has changed all that and in the process the Great Glen Fault was created. Powerful glaciers up until about 8000 years ago scoured the line of the fault, leaving a line splitting the highlands and leading to open water at either end (Loch Linnhe in the south west and the Moray Firth in the north east). Central to this is Loch Ness, 23 miles long and the second deepest Loch in Scotland – depths of up to 750feet.

During the late 1700s ideas were floated about building a canal to run through the fault, following Lochs Lochy, Oich and Ness, after all, they would only have to create 22 miles of man made canal as nature had already done most of the work. It was began finally in 1803 by two brilliant engineers: William Jessop and Thomas Telford and was opened in 1822 .

It is the earliest example of nationalized transport in Britain, because the government wanted to create jobs in the Highlands after all the Jacobite wars – perhaps they thought it would keep their minds off politics! Along the canal you will find plenty of examples of elegant bridges and locks which reflect the early period of the Industrial Revolution.

The Great Glen Way basically follows the fault line, stretching for 73 miles and was opened on 30th April 2002 by HRH Prince Andrew. The tour starts at Fort William, near the foot of Ben Nevis (Britain's highest peak, which can be readily ascended if you choose to spend an extra day), follows the shores of the famous Loch Ness, and finishes at Inverness, Scotland's north-most city and the "capital of the highlands". Most of the walking is straightforward, along canal towpaths and forest tracks, but there are some more challenging sections on the last couple of days.



General Information

Duration: 8 days (7 nights)

Grade: Easy-Moderate

Season: April to October.

Starting point: Fort William

End of tour: Inverness

Breakfast: in the UK will generally consist of sausage, bacon, eggs etc, cereals and fruit will also be available. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

Baths: it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests, but in the main it is showers.

Single Supplements: are payable on most of our tours. The single supplement guarantees the privacy of your own room, however, rooms can at times be small and in some places may not enjoy the same facilities as double/twin rooms.

Luggage: When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room.

Getting to the Start

Most convenient cities and airports:

Glasgow or Inverness:

Glasgow (Glasgow international and Prestwick airport). It is only about ½ an hour to the center from Glasgow International by airport bus approx (£3.50). Prestwick is 45 mins from the airport to Glasgow Central by train. Bus to Fort William (about 4 times a day from Buchanan St.Station). Approx journey time 3 hours. Or take train from Glasgow Central to Fort William. Approx journey time 3h 40mn.

If you fly into Inverness airport on BA or Easyjet, depending on timings, you could get a City Link coach from the city back to Fort William. The last coach to Fort William from the city is at approx 17:35.

Outward journey from London to start point: From Southern Britain We would advise you to fly: e.g BMI up to Glasgow Int. from Heathrow, or Easy Jet from Gatwick or Luton to Inverness and then Citylink coach.

You can of course take the train from London Kings Cross to Fort William (approx journey time 10 hours) and there is also an overnight sleeper service from London Euston to Fort Williams (approx journey time 12 hours).

Inward journey to Glasgow at end of tour: Train to Glasgow from Inverness approx 3 hours 30 mins – 4 hours, then allow 45 mins from Glasgow to airport.

Inward journey to London at end of tour: Ideally fly Easyjet back to Gatwick or Luton from Inverness. There are also British Airways services.

There is a direct train to London Kings Cross (approx journey time 8 hours). There is also an overnight sleeper service (approx journey time 11 hours).

National Rail website is www.nationalrail.co.uk if you want to look at the journey involved.

Your Accommodation

Please Note: the walk is becoming increasingly popular and places described below may vary especially in the larger towns where we may not be able to book our usual places for your dates.

❑ **Night 1:** We use a selection of bed & breakfast/guesthouses in Fort William all offering ensuite facilities. This town can and does get busy hence the reason for a need to use different accommodation. There are plenty of places to eat in Fort William.

❑ **Night 2:** We stay overnight in a comfortable, family run guesthouse, set in its own spacious grounds, and located on the outskirts of the picturesque Highland village of Spean Bridge.

❑ **Night 3:** Our 3 star Scottish Tourist Board hotel tonight is a fully modernized coaching inn from the Victorian era. There has been an inn on this site for hundreds of years. The out buildings which stand near the hotel date back to the 18th Century when the hotel was run by friends of Robert Burns, the famous poet. The menus are based on the finest of Scottish produce – beef, lamb, venison, game fish and seafood.

❑ **Night 4:** Tonight our guesthouse will be one of the many Victorian establishments in the attractive small town of Fort Augustus.

❑ **Night 5:** Our guesthouse was purpose built in 1995 to provide a family home and bed & breakfast accommodation. Each bedroom is well furnished and has a spacious ensuite bathroom or shower room with toilet and wash hand basin. You can relax in the evening in a large lounge with open fire and TV. The breakfast room enjoys great views of Sron Na Muic.

❑ **Night 6:** Your accommodation tonight was once the village church, it became redundant about 14 yrs ago and is now the home of Ross & Fiona Urquhart, who have transformed it into one of the most unique bed & breakfasts in Scotland.

❑ **Night 7:** Built in 1890 our 3 star (Scottish Tourist Board) hotel in Inverness is situated in a beautiful, tranquil location on the River Ness right in the heart of Inverness. It

is just a few minutes walk from the town center, railway station, Eden Court Theatre and other attractions.

PLEASE NOTE: It is generally normal practice when staying in hotels that you check-in on or after 2pm and checkout by 10 am the following morning. Guesthouses/bed & breakfast establishments are normally check-in on or after 4pm and checkout by 10am.

Outline Itinerary

❑ **Day 1 Arrival in Fort William:** There are only traces left of the original fort built to keep the dreaded Highlanders at bay. Today the town is the “Chamonix” of Scotland with a proliferation of outdoor shops, cafes, bookshops and bars to entertain you if you get in early enough. If you have an extra night here and you are an experienced hill walker, you could go and climb Ben Nevis, or you could take a boat trip to “Seal Island” to see the grey seals loitering around.

❑ **Day 2 Fort William to Gairloch:** Today’s walk is very easy and is only 10.5 miles/17km which will give you the opportunity to do several side trips. The first one being Old Inverloch Castle which is one of Scotland’s earliest stone castles, built in 1260. Continue on with your walk before taking a short diversion to Corpach sea loch, with its lock-keepers’ cottages and pepper-pot lighthouse. You then head up to the Tow path of the Caledonian Canal following it past “Neptune’s staircase” (a flight of 8 locks) to the small village of Gairloch 10.5 miles/17 km. It is likely that you will be staying at Spean Bridge which is another 3.5 miles hilly walk. If this is the case, normally the guest house will be able to collect and transfer you if you don’t want to walk. If you give them some notice of your arrival.

❑ **Day 3 Gairloch to Invergarry (via South Laggan): 16 miles/ 26km** A mainly easy but long walk today, but it does have some short steep ascents. You will be walking on a mixture of tarmac, forest paths and tracks, mostly shared with the Great Glen Cycle Route. Two miles after the start of your walk, you could take a side tip to Clan Cameron Museum and Cia-aig waterfall before rejoining the Way at Clunes (an extra mile/1.6km or so) but note that the museum is only opening the afternoons. From Clunes all the way to Kilfinnan, you walk on forest tracks, you will get splendid views of Loch Lochy with the mountains behind. From the South of Loch Oich, join the ‘Invergarry Link’ for the last 5km/3miles to the hotel in the gorgeous valley of the Garry River famed for fly fishing.

❑ **Day 4 Invergarry (Laggan) to Fort Augustus:** An easy walk today 12.5 miles/20km. The terrain is a mixture of tarmac, railway track bed, old military road, then a canal towpath. You enter the Leiterfean nature reserve, enjoying the wonderful ash, birch, elm and hazel woodland. If you have time you could walk up Meall a’Cholumain from Fort Augustus which is a great viewpoint. Fort Augustus was largely built in 1729 as the hub of General Wade’s military road building programme to calm the highlanders after Culloden and there are 5 Locks at the center of town on the Caledonian Canal and several museums. There are some great restaurants here and you might get in with enough time for a short cruise on Loch Ness.

❑ **Day 5 Fort Augustus to Invermoriston:** A harder day today 8 miles/13km with steeper ascents. You will climb through a forest of birch and pine, beside a stream and uphill to a forest track. You should get some dramatic views of Loch Ness at intervals through the woods. Walk through the village of Invermoriston with its little bridge built by Thomas Telford. The Invermoriston Hotel is a great place to eat and has several species of malt whisky. They also have great beer from The Skye Brewery. There are nice leafy walks down by the river.

❑ **Day 6 Invermoriston to Drumnadrochit:** A moderate day of walking today with some steep sections. 14 miles/22km. There is quite a bit of undulation today, but hopefully you'll be used to the walking now! For strong walkers in good weather you could ascend Meall Fuar-Mhonaidh from where you may get views from Ben Nevis all the way to Inverness. You can take excursions to Urquhart Castle approx (£7 entry) with commanding views over Lochness, café and an interpretational centre. You end up at Drumnadrochit, an attractive 'Green Village' which has a Loch Ness Monster visitor's center...or two!

❑ **Day 7 Drumnadrochit to Inverness:** Today would normally be a long day:18 mile/29km, which maybe too much, especially if you want to see something of Inverness. So the tour is shortened by an **optional** taxi transfer taking you from the town to near to Loch Laide, famous for its

very clean water. Descend then to Blackford and the Great Glen once again meeting the Caledonian Canal before reaching Inverness, a beautiful city of past and modern, although mostly Victorian.

❑ **Day 8 End of tour:** After breakfast depart from Inverness. Or why not spend a day here visiting the Neo Gothic St. Andrew's Cathedral and the Castle, the museum and art galleries at this Scotland's Northern Capital. We would recommend that you visit Fort George, the Clava Stones and the newly rebuilt Culloden centre which are all nearby, and with the exception of the Clava Stones, on local bus routes.

Included

Bed and breakfast on all days throughout your itinerary. Ensuite facilities where available. 1 piece of luggage per person transferred from Inn to Inn. Full route notes and map package.

Extending Your Tour

Extra nights are available anywhere along the route.

Suggested city-breaks in the same region: Edinburgh.

Escorted Departures 2009

EWGL19 Sun 19 April - Sun 26 April

EWGL04 Sun 04 October - Sun 11 October