

Dalwhinnie to Loch Rannoch

By Andy Crawford

WALK FACTS

Distance: 25½ miles/41km.

Maps: OS Landranger 1:50,000 Sheet 42 or Explorer 1:25,000 Sheets 385 and 393.

Start: Grid Ref: 633846. Beside the level crossing at the end of the road beside Dalwhinnie railway station.

Finish: Grid Ref: 506576. The forest access gate ½ mile/400m north of Rannoch Lodge, at the western end of Loch Rannoch.

Notes: Ideally, two cars, a helpful driver for one car, or the local taxi from Kinloch Rannoch are required to complete this walk. Cars should be parked at the finish point - ensuring they are kept clear of the forest access gate.

Grading: This is a long, linear walk that follows the western shore of Loch Ericht on good estate roads to begin with and then on more remote hill tracks, but it is quite feasible for it to be completed in one long day by any fit and competent walkers. Some less obvious tracks through very boggy ground should also be expected.

There is little shelter on the route therefore full extreme weather clothing should be carried as well as a first aid kit and adequate food and water. A route plan, up-to-date maps for the area and a good compass - and the ability to use them to navigate effectively - are also essential.

Dalwhinnie, Gaelic for 'meeting place' stands at a junction of the former cattle-droving routes from the west and north that led south to the markets at Falkirk and Crieff in the Central Lowlands and is home to the highest distillery in Scotland. It is an isolated and barren place, located midway between Perth and Inverness, in a glen with the Monadhliath Mountains to the west and the Forest of Atholl, the Cairngorms and the Grampians to the east.

The northern section of the route is on the Ben Alder Estate. Click [here](#) for more information and the southern section of Camusericht is in part of the much larger Corroul Estate. Click [here](#) for more information.

The walk begins at the railway level crossing a short distance to the south of Dalwhinnie Station. Negotiate the crossing with care onto the wide estate road that leads alongside Loch Ericht for 5 miles/8km to Ben Alder Lodge. This first section is relatively straightforward as far as the Lodge from where it heads out onto a hill road for another 2 miles/3.2km to the boatshed/stable near to Loch Pattack, a small loch lying to the southeast of Loch Laggan and northwest of Loch Ericht. Be sure to be mindful of estate vehicles as well as the menace of the free-roaming horses that will search out any food in a rucksack!

With the magnificent bulk of Ben Alder, the Lancet Edge of Aonach Beag and Geal Charn ahead, follow the broad grassy track southwest (left) from here over the exposed moor-land for about 3 miles/4.8km to a point where another track cuts away sharply right towards a very shaky suspension footbridge over the Allt a' Chaoil-réidhe at Grid Ref: 524764. Cross this bridge carefully - being sure to do so one at a time as the sign suggests - and continue left to Culra Bothy that stands a short distance before Culra Lodge.

It is worth noting here that the bothy provides the last refuge on the route until reaching Ben Alder Cottage beside Loch Ericht some 8 miles/12.9km away.

A narrow track leads from here alongside the gurgling waters of the Allt a' Bhealaich Dhuibh up to and across the Bealach Dubh, involving an ascent of around 820 feet/250m over a distance of some 3

miles/4.8km. This is the only 'serious' climb on the route - but not particularly difficult as the statistic suggests - and perhaps the most spectacular part of the walk.

There are some narrow stream crossings to negotiate along the way and, should they be in spate, may present a minor challenge. At the summit of the bealach, lie remnants of a WWI Wellington bomber (L7867 JM-J) that crashed there on 15th November 1943 whilst on a Nav-Ex from RAF Lossiemouth. Much of the wreckage was transported away by mules, leaving very little remaining at the site. At this height, on a clear day, some of the best views on the walk can be expected - south to Corroun and Loch Ossian; behind to Dalwhinnie and the walk in. This is just over the halfway stage - 13 miles/21km.

The next 4 miles/6.4km of the route begins with a descent into the valley, on a pleasant gradient, then bears left and gently up towards the Bealach Cumhann following a good stalkers' path. The numerous small feeder streams along the way should pose no problems. At the end of this path, beside the shore of Loch Ericht, stands the reportedly haunted Benalder Cottage. To the right of here, cross the stile leading into a small fenced compound and follow the path that leads over to another stile to reach the Alder Burn and negotiate the high step up onto the footbridge - not shown on the OS Explorer map. Once over the bridge, the 'fun' really begins!

Although not defined on either of the OS maps for the area, this final part of the walk starts with a wet - rather boggy - 1½ miles/2.4km section beginning with a short rise through a small stand of pines and leading over onto a very faint path marked by wooden stakes heading back down to the sandy shores of Loch Ericht then along the outer edge of a high deer fence. This is followed by a further 1½ miles/2.4km on a gradually improving track to another footbridge crossing the Cam Chriochan. The view back from here, up the length of Loch Ericht, can be spectacular given the right conditions.

The final section of some 6 miles/9.7km passes through the Camusericht Estate and requires the careful crossing of some high, locked gates - principally to exclude mountain bikers - by a ladder at the side of each. This is another fine part of the walk on rough, wide roads across open ground passing Lochan na h-Aon Chraoibh hidden by the trees on the left and with good views over to Lochan Ioin nan Donnlaich and Lochan Sron Smeur. About 270 yards/250m before the forest, where the road reaches a high, locked gate with no obvious way of crossing it, another faint track continues south (ahead) and narrows down the forest edge to join the wide road again and out to the finish.

Sincere thanks are due to my friends Archie and Mary Martin for enduring the vagaries of the Scottish weather, over a considerable period of time, to reconnoitre this route and so ensuring a most enjoyable, if long, day's walking.