

Glen Tilt from Blair Atholl

by Andy Crawford

WALK FACTS

Distance: 13 miles/ 21 km

Map: OS 1:50,000 Landranger Sheet 43

Start/parking: Blair Atholl. There is a car park on the west side of the main road through the village at Grid Ref NN873654.

Grading: This is a relatively straightforward route of quiet, scenic beauty suitable for walkers of most abilities. There is no public vehicle access onto the glen road but walkers should, nevertheless, stay alert for the occasional presence of Atholl Estate traffic.

The route is over good tracks throughout with a short stretch of road walking near the finish. The glen is a commercial game area for deer and grouse and where sheep and cattle graze therefore dogs must be kept on a lead.

Walking on the hills can be disturbing for farm animals, game birds and deer. During the shooting season (August-October), it can be dangerous so stay on the path. On weekends between March and October the shooting range on the west bank is used for high velocity rifle practice. This route does not pass through the range.

Blair Atholl lies at the junction of the rivers Tilt and Garry 34 miles/55 km north of the city of Perth. The village has hotels and camping and caravan facilities and is well situated for walks into the Grampians via Glen Tilt, the Minigaig Pass and Old Struan Path. Tourist attractions include the imposing Blair Castle - seat of the Murray Dukes of Atholl - that dates from the 13th Century.

The castle has hosted many historic figures including Graham of Claverhouse (1649-89), who occupied the castle in 1689, was killed nearby at the Battle of Killiecrankie and lies buried in the ruined church of St Brides at Old Blair that overlooks the castle. Blair has the distinction of being the last castle in Britain to have been besieged during the second Jacobite Rising (1746).

The present facade of the castle was created in the 1870s, when it was remodelled and extended in Scots-Baronial style by the Edinburgh architect David Bryce.

The Duke of Atholl has the distinction of having the only remaining private army in Europe, the Atholl Highlanders, which holds parades from time to time at the castle.

The River Tilt begins as a number of feeder streams in the hills around the Falls of Tarf and flows for 11 miles through the broad valley of Glen Tilt to Blair Atholl where it merges with the River Garry. This walk includes the serenity of part of the glen, the beauty of the woods and waterfalls for which the area is renowned and also the magnificence of the surrounding hills.

This is a spectacular route to walk at any time of the year but more especially on a sunny autumn day.

Exit the car park and cross the road, carefully, towards the caravan site entrance. On the right is a small, fenced enclosure. Follow the fence line around the enclosure to join the path alongside the River Tilt. Take care at the places where there are steep drops to the river with no guard rails. Cross the arched footbridge over the road to Old Blair and turn right at the wooden post with red and yellow direction arrows on it then up to a junction with the main glen access road where a yellow arrow indicates the way to the right. This is the wide track to follow all the way up the glen to Forest Lodge.

Along the way take time to enjoy the views of the river, the variety of trees and the surrounding hills, towering to over 3,280 feet/1,000m at times. After periods of heavy rain the power of the river charging over and through between rocks is quite awesome.

The track crosses a bridge onto the south side of the river just before Croftmore. The low bridge parapet makes an ideal place to pause for refreshments and photographs.

A short distance past Marble Lodge the track re-crosses the river and continues north eastwards on the north side of the river and, again, the low bridge parapet makes an ideal place to pause for refreshments and even more photographs.

At this crossing, resist the temptation to follow the wide grassy track from the gate and stile at the south end of the bridge that leads up the hillside on the south side of the river ending where the OS Sheet 43 shows a bridge back over the river at the (derelict) Balaneasie cottage. Be assured there is no bridge at

this point, nor is there any trace of one ever having been. Cross the bridge and continue along the track to Forest Lodge.

To return from Forest Lodge, retrace the inward route for a short distance - as far as Grid Ref NN924735 - to where a grass track leads to the right. Follow this for approximately 1¼ miles/2km as it ascends gently to pass behind Clachghlas then rejoin the main track opposite the (derelict) cottage at Balaneasie. Cross the stile at the south end of the bridge before Marble Lodge this time and climb up onto a wide grassy track that leads right (westwards) above the buildings then rejoins the main track again.

At Grid Ref NN890712 there is a direction post set into a mound of stones on which there is a yellow arrow pointing left. Turn off the main track here and follow the gently ascending wide grass track that leads into woodland. Stay alert on this path to the directions that follow to exit the woodland safely: at Grid Ref NN883681 take the right fork that descends down another track then at Grid Ref NN877670 take the left fork that bears sharply away from the route that leads ahead. This track eventually exits the woodland into a field and out through a gate beside a house called 'Atholl Bank'. Turn to the right here down a stretch of tarmac road.

At the first junction turn right following the sign 'Old Blair ½ mile' and pass below the arched footbridge that was crossed in the early stage of the walk. Just past here, on the left, is the entrance to Glen Tilt Car Park opposite the gate and lodge for the route to Forest Lodge. Turn left into the car park then immediately left again along the woodland path that leads towards the river. Turn right and follow the riverside path back to Blair Atholl.

For a longer, whole day, one-way walk, there is a right of way through Glen Tilt over to the Linn of Dee near Braemar.