

Cat Law, Glens in Miniature and a Mid 19th Century Castle

By Andy Crawford

WALK FACTS

Distance: 11 miles/17.5 km

Map: OS 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 44 (also 53 and 54)

Start/parking: Wester Lednathie farm - *with permission from the farmer*

Grading: A fairly stiff initial climb on good farm and hill tracks, flattening out on the final 100m or so to the summit of Cat Law. Some quiet road walking. An easy summer route but in winter weather or low cloud, some navigational skill may be required due to the many paths which crisscross the hill. This is commercial breeding land for grouse and pheasant and where sheep and cattle graze so dogs must be kept on a lead. Mountain bikes are not permitted.

Although the Angus glens of Clova and Prosen are possibly the best known, Glen Uig and Glen Quharity - nestling in the hills to the south of Glen Prosen - make for a delightfully unique walking experience. The view north from Kirriemuir is dominated by a shapely hill which, when you also take in its smaller outlying peak, looks like a curled up feline. This slumbering form is aptly called Cat Law.

Park at Wester Lednathie, about 1 mile/1.5 km to the west of Easter Lednathie on the unclassified road. The farmer here is usually quite amenable to walkers leaving their car(s) within the confines of the farm if they seek his permission.

Just before leaving the farm pass through the gate on the left and follow the wide track as it curves to the right, southwestwards, up a gentle rise alongside a dry-stone wall before passing through a stand of trees with a high gate at its highest point then out onto the open moorland where scores of arctic hares are easily spotted, especially when wearing their white winter coats.

Approximately 1 mile/1.5 km into the walk, at Grid Ref NO311620, a cross-track is reached beside a gate with a low boundary stone beside it. Take the left hand path and follow the line of the fence up to the flat summit of Cat Law (2,201 ft/671m). Pass through a gate at the junction of fences - note another boundary stone beside it - to reach the triangulation pillar and the crude stone shelters that are a feature of this hill top and provide the ideal place to settle down for a break.

From here, follow the wide path that leads off to the southwest descending to Knowehead of Auldallan. Clear the field edge onto the tarmac road and turn right, northwestwards, for a short distance to where two derelict gatehouses mark the driveway leading to Balintore Castle.

Balintore Castle, a Grade A listed castle built in the mid 19th century, is described by the Scottish Civic Trust as one of the finest examples of Scottish Baronial-style Architecture and of national importance - incorporating crow-stepped gables, early French Renaissance scrolled dormer-heads, fish-scale slated roofs, turrets, gargoyles and an elaborate Jacobean door piece. Sadly, the building, now owned by an absentee Taiwanese millionaire since 1995, is slowly disintegrating. Conservationists have urged that it be protected and repaired before being lost to the nation. The sandstone used to build the castle was brought from Stirlingshire, shipped around the Fife coast and up the River Tay. The dressed blocks were then loaded onto carts for the tortuous overland journey to the rolling Angus hinterland. It is said that the year's building process almost killed off the county's stock of draught horses!

Balintore was completed by 1860, continued in use throughout the early part of the 20th century when a turbine was installed to provide electricity, until the early 1960's when the rot set in and repair work was abandoned.

From the castle, continue down the steep road, left across the bridge, then right onto the narrow road leading to Longdrum farm following alongside the Quharity burn most of the way. From the farm, the road becomes a wide farm track giving access to the grouse moors of Lednathie Estate. Low hills, just over 500m, line either side of the path as it rises gently northeastwards through peaceful Glen Quharity until turning almost 90° right, at the watershed, then descends into the narrower Glen Uig back to the starting place.