

Planning to walk the Way

The Way begins in Milngavie near Glasgow, Scotland's largest city, then passes through its first National Park along the shores of its largest loch. Loch Lomond forms a water-bridge spanning the Lowlands and Highlands, with unique geology and wildlife. After 95 miles of superb scenery, the Way ends in Fort William, at the foot of Ben Nevis, Britain's highest mountain.

Some of the walking is straightforward, along tracks, drovers' paths and old military roads. Some of it can be very rough or boggy underfoot. Other parts can be very exposed and must be taken seriously. If you are not experienced in long-distance walking, read the section for *Novices*: see page 12. In advance of tackling the Way, most people will benefit from several long day walks, to test their feet, their gear and their fitness.

No such walk should be undertaken casually, because the weather in Scotland is so unpredictable. On any given day, you may experience weather typical of any season, and perhaps of all four. This adds charm and variety to the experience, but also makes it important to have the right equipment: see pages 14-15.

This book has been planned in the recommended direction, from south to north, and the drop-down map (back cover) follows this sequence. The gentle lowland gradients will help you to get into your stride before the more exposed and challenging northerly sections. Also, the prevailing wind is south-westerly, so you are more likely to have it behind you.

South over Loch Lomond

How long will it take?

People spread the walk over 5 to 8 days, depending on the time available and the pace they find comfortable. Remember that the total distance (95½ miles/154 km) excludes the extra miles that you walk to and from your accommodation. Table 1 shows distances along the Way and suggests five ways of dividing up the mileage. For likely daily distances, see page 12.

You can reach the start and return from the finish by public transport: Table 2 gives approximate times for bus, train and car travel.

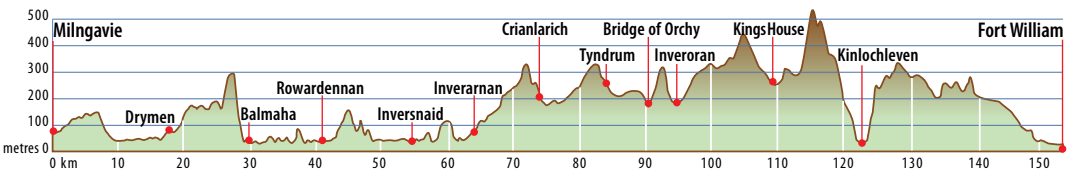
Part 3 describes the Way in 6 sections that roughly correspond with our 6 map panels, but most people will want to allow at least 7 or 8 days. Don't underestimate the time you need: it's a shame to be walking among some of Scotland's finest scenery and wildlife without time to savour it.

Table 1: Spread the distance over 5 to 8 days

Number of days:	5	6	7a	7b	8
	miles	km			
Milngavie					
Drymen	18½	30	12	19	12
Balmaha		13½	22	13½	22
Rowardennan	21½	35		14½	23
Inversnaid		20½	32	14½	23
Inverarnan				13	22
Crianlarich	19½	31	19½	31	12
Tyndrum		16	26	13½	22
Bridge of Orchy					10
Inveroran	21	34	12½	22	12½
Kings House		18½	30	8½	13
Kinlochleven	15	24	15	24	15
Fort William					15

In Table 1, our 6-day option arranges the distance with manageable start and finish days, allowing for some travelling time. This is still a demanding schedule, calling for a fast pace or long hours of daylight. If you intend to overnight at start and finish anyway, one of the 7-day options may suit. Unless you are experienced, don't even consider the 5-day option: walking 18½ miles (30 km) on your first day, followed by 21½ (35 km) on your second, is unlikely to make for a good holiday. Any early blister problems can only get worse. Anyway, for a holiday, a 7-day or 8-day option will be far more enjoyable, allowing time for side-trips and relaxing lunch stops.

The altitude profile below shows how the gradients north of Loch Lomond are steeper than those in the southern half of the Way. Although low-lying, many walkers find the section north from Inversnaid surprisingly tiring. The overall ascent for the whole route is about 4100 m (13,500 ft).



If you need to shorten the walk to fit the time available, you could use public transport, e.g. a bus to Drymen or Ardlui. To complete the Way in two long weekends, divide it at Crianlarich, easily reached by train, car or bus. Follow option 6 or 7B for the southern 3 days, then 6 for the northern 3-day stretch.

Your choice of accommodation is important in planning the whole trip. The Way has a range of low-cost accommodation: see page 13.

There are also lots of B&Bs, inns and hotels for those who prefer a soft bed after a hard day's walking. Holiday companies will organise it all for you (see the list at www.rucsacs.com/links), or do it yourself using the official leaflet and/or website: see page 61. Remember that you need not always stay exactly where your day's walk begins or ends: for example, accommodation at

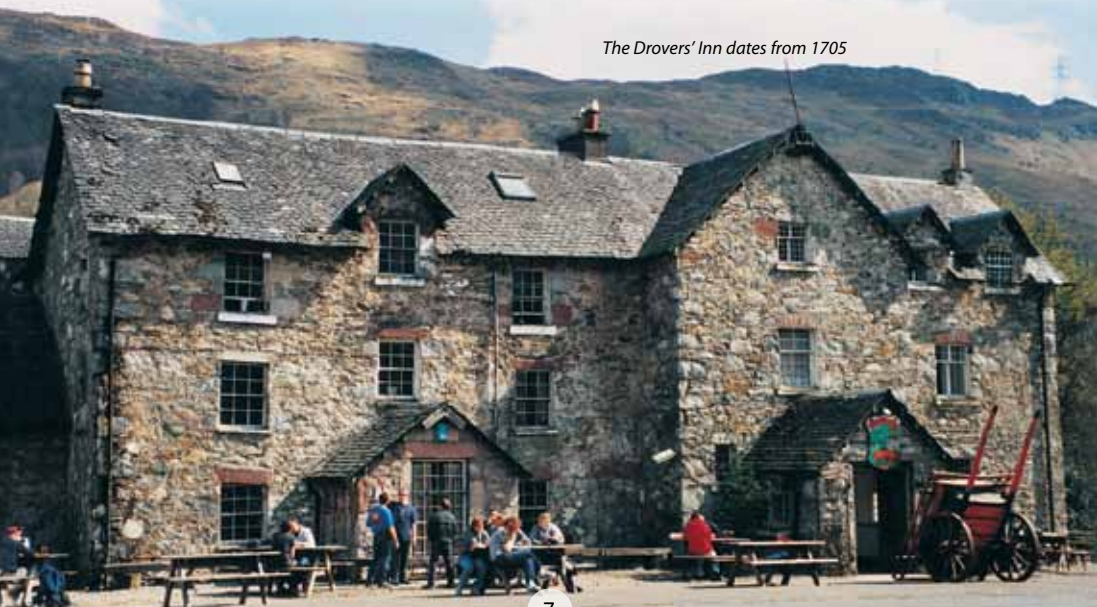
Inveroran is very limited, but a taxi or lift back to Bridge of Orchy would widen your choice. At Inversnaid, however, unless hotel, bunkhouse or campsite have space and suit you, you are a very long way from any alternative.

Whatever you do, don't leave accommodation to chance: it can be scarce, both out of season and in high summer, and pre-booking is essential. Also, especially in busy months such as May, avoid setting off from Milngavie on a Saturday, because that's what most people do. Many accommodation problems can be avoided simply by leaving on a weekday, or by walking from north to south instead.



Doune bothy offers basic shelter

The Drovers' Inn dates from 1705



Planning your travel

To plan your travel, consult the maps together with the table, which shows the shortest scheduled times for bus and train (as of 2011). Car journey times are based on driving within speed limits with minimal fuel stops, making no allowance for traffic holdups: all figures are rough guidelines only. Check timetables carefully in advance: not all services are daily, and in winter services tend to be less frequent. Contact details for transport providers are given on page 61.

Table 2: Distances and shortest journey times between selected places

		<i>miles</i>	<i>km</i>	<i>by bus</i>	<i>by train</i>	<i>by car</i>
Glasgow	→ Fort William	100	160	3h	3h 45m	2h 30m
Glasgow	→ Crianlarich	48	77	1h 30m	1h 50m	1h 30m
Crianlarich	→ Fort William	52	83	1h 30m	1h 45m	1h
Edinburgh	→ Fort William	145	232	4h	5h	3h 30m
Edinburgh	→ Glasgow	45	72	1h	50m	1h
London	→ Glasgow	400	640	8h 15m	5h 10m	7h

If you arrive in Scotland by plane, renting a car at the airport might seem attractive. However, you would have to find somewhere reasonably safe to leave the car for a week, and allow time to return to it from the other end of the walk. It may be cheaper and simpler to use public transport and taxis. Bankell Farm campsite near Milngavie offers car parking for a nightly fee.

You could consider leaving a car at Crianlarich and using the train or bus to reach the start (and return from the finish) of the Way. This would allow you to exchange some clothing and other supplies part-way. You could arrange to park it at the B&B or hotel where you are staying, at your own risk.

If you have a non-walking driver in your group, he or she could arrange to rendezvous with hikers. The drop-down map (back cover) shows where main roads meet the Way, and also the railway stations. Scottish Citylink operates buses from Glasgow up the A82 that stop at Luss, Arrochar, Ardlui, Crianlarich, Tyndrum, Bridge of Orchy, Glencoe and Fort William. There is also a local service between Fort William and Kinlochleven via Ballachulish.

What is the best time of year?

Fortunately for those who have little choice over their holiday dates, any season apart from winter can be fine. Be prepared for cold, wet and windy weather at any time, and you may be pleasantly surprised. Below are some factors to ponder: