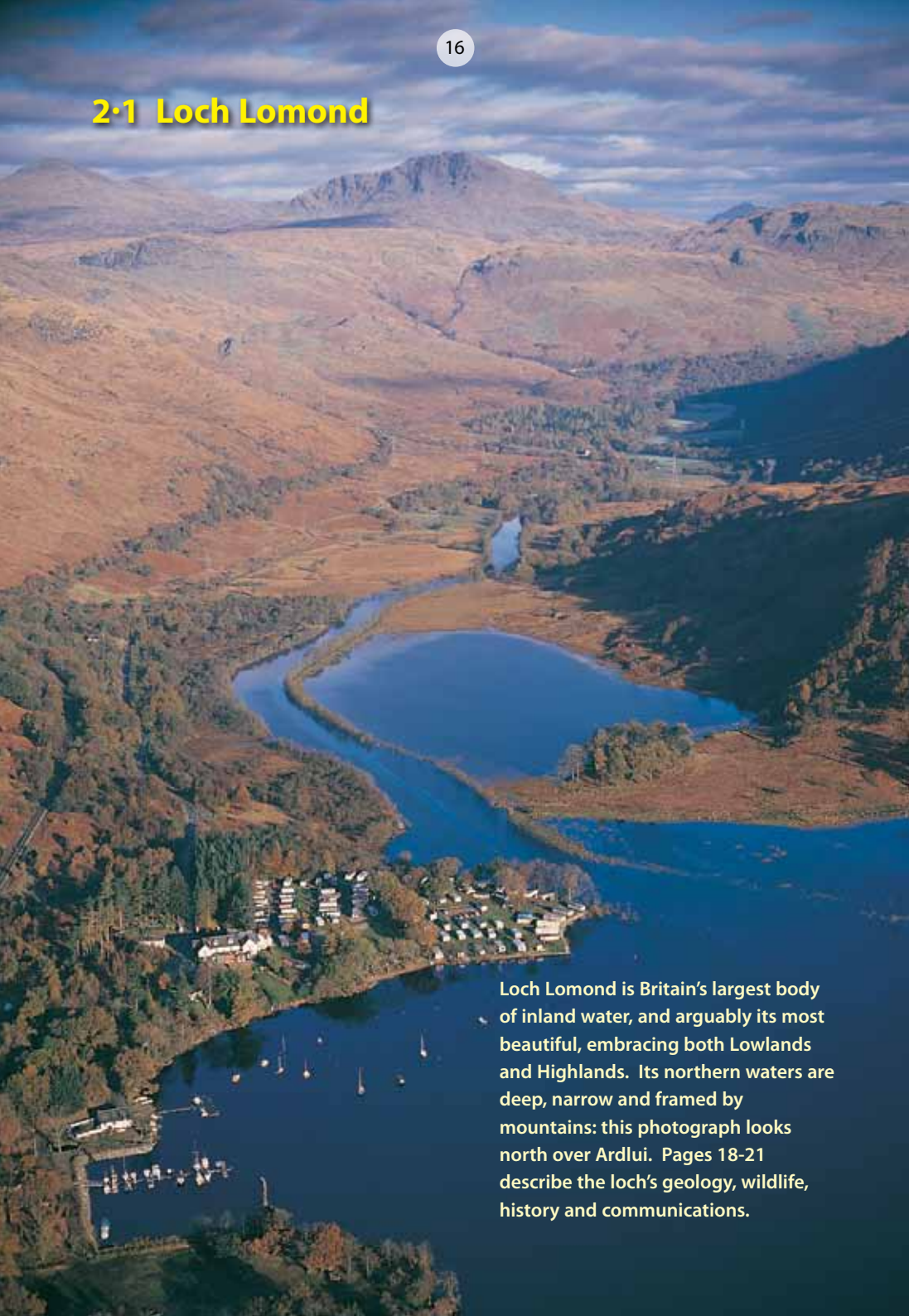


2·1 Loch Lomond



Loch Lomond is Britain's largest body of inland water, and arguably its most beautiful, embracing both Lowlands and Highlands. Its northern waters are deep, narrow and framed by mountains: this photograph looks north over Ardlui. Pages 18-21 describe the loch's geology, wildlife, history and communications.

Loch Lomond is 22 miles (35 km) long and up to 5 miles (8 km) wide, with an area of 27½ square miles. Of its 38 islands, only four lie north of Ross Point. The Way follows its eastern shore for nearly 20 miles (32 km).

Its deepest part is near Inversnaid, where it sinks to over 625 feet (190 m). The southern loch is much shallower, south of Inchcailloch being less than 50 feet (15 m) deep. In the extreme winter of 1895, it froze so deeply that thousands of people came to skate and walk on the loch.



Loch Lomond north of Inversnaid

The islands have been the sites of crannogs (see page 20), prisons, churches, graveyards, castles and religious foundations. Most are privately owned, and many are Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Inchcailloch is part of a National Nature Reserve: see page 36. The area is rich in plant and bird life: over one quarter of British wild plants have been recorded, as have 200 of Britain's 230 or so native bird species.

The loch is a major water supply: up to 100 million gallons may be taken from it daily. This would lower its level by just over two inches if not offset by inflow from rivers and rainfall. More than 75% of the water draining into the loch comes from the higher, wetter land in the north, drained by the River Falloch system.

North over Island I Vow



Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park

Scotland's first National Park had its royal opening in July 2002. Within its 720 sq mi (1865 sq km) lies some of Scotland's finest scenery, with 22 lochs, 50 rivers, 20 Munros and 19 Corbetts. Loch Lomond lies at the heart of its living, working landscape.

Over 40 miles (64 km) of the Way lies inside the Park, from south of Drymen to north of Tyndrum. The National Park headquarters are at Carrochan Road, Balloch, G83 8EG (tel 01389 722 600). Visit its website at www.lochlomond-trossachs.org

Geology

Although joined as a single body of water, there are really two Loch Lomonds: north of Ross Point is a loch 13 miles (21 km) long but less than a mile wide, with typical Highland scenery of tall mountains plunging steeply into its deep waters. This northern loch has only four islands, all small and near the shore. Joined to it is the shallow southern loch: 8-9 miles (13-14 km) long and up to 5 miles wide, surrounded by low-lying farmland with rolling hills beyond. Large wooded islands are scattered across it, some still inhabited.

The cause is the Highland Boundary Fault, which cuts straight through the loch. The ancient heat-hardened rocks of the north here give way to the younger, more easily eroded sandstones and conglomerates of the south. The Fault is a corridor or zone, rather than a thin line, and the division that it marks – between Highlands and Lowlands – pervades the natural and human history of this area. You can see the line clearly during the descent from Conic Hill: see the photographs below and on page 38.

The basic geology of the area was settled by about 350 million years ago. During the last Ice Age, Loch Lomond was scoured out by the southward flow of the glaciers. Before then, most of the rivers used to drain eastward. Both Rivers Falloch and Endrick have probably reversed their direction since the last Ice Age.

After the ice retreated, some 10,000 years ago, Loch Lomond emerged in roughly its present shape but as a sea loch, connected with the Firth of Clyde along the Vale of Leven. By about 5500 years ago, the sea level had dropped, leaving it cut off as a freshwater loch. Nowadays it lies only about 26 feet (8 m) above sea level, rising and falling by up to 10 feet (3 m).

*From Conic Hill, looking south-west over
Inchcailloch and Inchmurrin*





The islands make good nesting sites for birds

Wildlife

The loch supports a rich variety of plants, insects, birds and 18 species of fish, from tiny sticklebacks to coarse fish such as roach, perch and huge pike. A curiosity is the powan (*Coregonus*), a salmonid fish which feeds on plankton and occurs only in two former sea lochs, the other being Loch Eck.

On and near the water, you will see common ducks such as mallards and tufted ducks, as well as terns and various gulls which build their nests on the islands. Look out for dippers (good swimmers, despite unwebbed feet) and wagtails (grey and pied).

Fish-eating birds feast in these waters, including cormorant and diving ducks such as goosander and red-breasted merganser. Other ducks, including goldeneye and pochard, may be seen in the quieter northern parts of the loch. In spring look out for rare visitors such as the red-throated and black-throated diver.

For wildlife living near the mouth of the River Endrick and on Loch Lomond-side, see page 27.

Tufted duck (male)



History

Although humans have probably lived on Loch Lomond-side for over 7000 years, the evidence you are likely to see is more recent: early human settlements on crannogs and (much later) cashels. A crannog is an artificial island dating from the Iron Age (around 2000 years ago), but some continued in use well into the middle ages.

People made them by sinking boulders and logs in a shallow area of a loch or river until the top rose above the water. Then they built a hut on a timber foundation, sometimes linking it to the shore with a causeway just below the water surface. East of the island of Inchcailloch is 'The Kitchen' crannog, and when the loch is low you may see its causeway. Another good example is in the water just south of Strathcashell Point.

On the Point itself, there is a cashel – a structure dating from early Christian times, enclosed by a dry-stone wall. The remains suggest an enclosure of about 90 feet by 80 feet, within which was a rectangular building which may have been used for religious purposes. St Kessog, an Irish monk, built a monastery on Inchtavannach in the sixth century, and his statue is in the church at Luss.

St Kentigerna, another Irish missionary, settled on Inchcailloch, an ideal place to appreciate Loch Lomond's history: see page 36. After her death in AD 733-4, a group of nuns continued to live and worship there. In the 13th century, a church was built and dedicated to her. It acted as parish church until 1621, when it fell into decay. Burials continued on Inchcailloch until 1947.

There you will see dates from 1623 onward; weathering has eroded the older dates. A table stone marks the grave of Gregor, Chief of Clan MacGregor and uncle of Rob Roy: see page 23. Although Gregor died in 1693, his grave stone was later recarved and shows the date as 1623.

Inchcailloch burial ground



Communications

The loch forms a barrier to east-west communications. Apart from the A82 trunk road along the west shore, the only roads are:





- a minor road to Rowardennan from the south
- a single-track road to Inversnaid from the east;

and the only connection between these two is on foot, by the West Highland Way.

The West Highland Line railway runs along the west shore from Tarbet northward. Tarbet lies on the narrow neck of land only 100 feet high separating Loch Lomond from the sea in Loch Long. This obstacle was overcome in 1263, when 40 Viking longships from King Haakon's fleet sailed up Loch Long. They were then hauled overland and sailed down Loch Lomond, raiding and burning.

Nowadays, three ferry services ply the loch in summer, run by hotels in Rowardennan, Inversnaid and Ardlui: see table below. Cruise Loch Lomond also offers a 'Rambler Cruise' from Tarbet (daily in summer): the boat drops walkers at Rowardennan and collects from Inversnaid: tel 01301 702 356.

To visit Inchcailloch, contact McFarlane's Boatyard (01360 870 214), whose ferries run from Balmaha year-round, weather permitting. In 2011, it cost £5 return per adult.

<i>Route</i>	<i>Service</i>	<i>Telephone</i>
 Rowardennan / Inverbeg	three services daily, in summer only	01360 870 273
 Inversnaid / Inveruglas	private ferry, summer only, phone to check	01877 386 223
 Inversnaid / Tarbet	three services daily, in summer only	01301 702 356
 Ardleish / Ardlui	request by hoisting signal at Ardleish; operates 0915–1900, April–October	01301 704 243

