

Foreword

The CATERAN Trail offers a great wilderness experience to anybody who is willing to walk. The Trail is under two hours from Scotland's busy capital, but it has mountains, lochs and big skies, with three wonderful valleys to explore: Strathardle, Glen Shee and Glen Isla. It's one of Scotland's Great Trails, and its outstanding scenery and wildlife are made accessible by excellent waymarking.



The area is blessed with historic hotels, welcoming B&Bs and fine local produce, and you are never more than seven miles from the nearest village.

I grew up near Glen Shee and the mountains of Perthshire were my playground. This countryside formed me as a young explorer, and although I've since enjoyed adventurous travel in many continents, I always enjoy returning to Perthshire. I live very close to the Trail, and have walked it often. I completed 54 miles of the CATERAN Yomp (see page 71) and in 2015 I was delighted to act as its Ambassador. More recently, my young sons have enjoyed sections of the Trail.

In this edition, the publisher has given the Trail the splendid guidebook that it deserves. Mike Bell's superb photographs let me discover afresh the scenery, moods and dramatic lighting of the Trail. The Footprint mapping is clear and convenient to use. And the text is concise and comprehensive, with lots of local detail.

The CATERAN Trail is waiting for you. Why not seize the moment?

Polly Murray

www.pollymurray.com

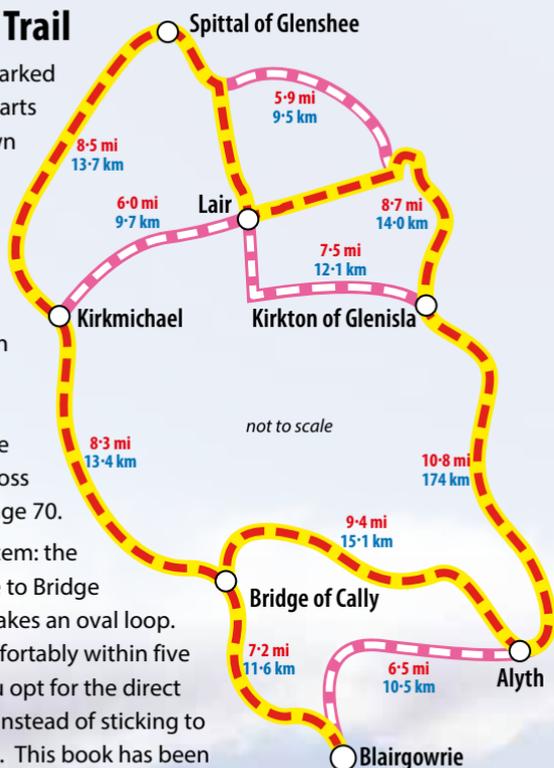


Planning to walk the Trail

The Cateran Trail is a fully waymarked walk of 64 miles (104 km) that starts and finishes in the Highland town of Blairgowrie, the 'berry capital of the world': see page 30. It lies about 15 miles north of Perth and 60 miles north of Edinburgh. Named after the cattle-rustlers of the 15th to 17th centuries, the Trail uses ancient paths through an area rich in history, scenery and wildlife. The Trail is managed by Perth & Kinross Countryside Trust (PKCT): see page 70.

The Trail resembles a leaf on a stem: the stem takes you from Blairgowrie to Bridge of Cally. From there, the Trail makes an oval loop. The Trail can be completed comfortably within five days, with a short final day if you opt for the direct route from Alyth to Blairgowrie instead of sticking to the main Trail via Bridge of Cally. This book has been planned and written assuming that you will start and finish at Blairgowrie, and follow the circuit clockwise.

If you decide to walk the Trail anti-clockwise instead, you will have to reverse the book's sequence and directions.



The Trail south of Spittal



Best time of year and weather

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

- Winter is far from ideal, because the days are so short: at this latitude daylight lasts for only 6-7 hours in late December.
- On winter timetables, public transport is less frequent.
- In summer, hikers may suffer from pests such as midges (tiny biting insects) and clegs (blood-sucking horse-flies).
- In summer, there will be more pressure on accommodation; however, many B&Bs close for the winter.

The weather in Scotland is very unpredictable, except at short notice. On any given day, you may experience weather typical of any season, and perhaps of all four. This adds variety to the experience, but also underlines the importance of being well-equipped and well-prepared. For sources of weather forecasts, see page 71. On balance, if you are free to choose, the ideal months are probably May/June and September/early October.

In mid-June, the annual CATERAN YOMP takes place, a large fund-raising event for the Soldiers Charity: avoid that weekend unless you wish to be involved in it, see page 71.

North-west over Spittal from the Trail



How long will it take?

To complete the Trail comfortably, allow five days. Table 1 shows the daily distances, and Part 3 describes the Way in five sections, each corresponding with a day's walking. If you don't mind longer daily distances, you can fit it into four days in various ways, of which the most obvious is to limit yourself to the loop from Bridge of Cally. If you follow the Trail from Alyth to Kirkmichael via Bridge of Cally, the total distance is a manageable 17.7 miles (28.5 km). You can begin and end this circuit at any point that suits your accommodation and transport arrangements, but, if coming by car, please park considerately. Each night you reach a village on or near the Trail with accommodation and refreshments, although there are some recent issues at Spittal: see below. Advance booking is essential, wherever you plan to stay.

If you prefer to camp, you face some challenges: the only commercial campsites are at Blairgowrie and Alyth. However, wild camping is allowed in Scotland under the *Scottish Outdoor Access Code* provided it is done responsibly: see pages 13 and 70. So you could complete the Trail while camping each night, as long as you are prepared for self-sufficient wild camping in suitably chosen places.

The Cateran Minitrail lets you sample the Trail's fine scenery within the space of a weekend. On day one, walk the Trail from Kirkmichael to Spittal or to Dalhenzean Lodge (1 mile off-trail). On day two, follow the Trail to the B951, turn right for Cray and follow our route description for the Cray to Kirkmichael section: see page 64. The total distance is about 20.5 miles/33 km, or a couple of miles more via Dalhenzean. You can walk the Minitrail anti-clockwise instead, or start it at Spittal instead of Kirkmichael. However, if arriving by car, don't start from Lair or Cray since neither has any suitable parking.

Table 1: daily distances

	miles	km
Blairgowrie	15.5	24.9
Kirkmichael	8.5	13.7
Spittal	14.6	23.5
Kirkton	10.8	17.4
Alyth <i>via Bridge of Cally to</i>	15.0	24.1
Blairgowrie		
Total	64.4	103.6
Alyth <i>direct to</i>	6.5	10.5
Blairgowrie		
3-7 shortcut total	55.9	89.9
Br of Cally circuit	51.6	83.0

Open views from the Trail north of Alyth

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>
Perth/Blairgowrie	15	24	45m	-	30m
Edinburgh/Perth	45	72	1h 30m	1h 15m	1h
Glasgow/Perth	62	100	1h 40m	58m	1h 15m
London/Edinburgh	400	650	9h 30m	4h 20m	7h 30m

*All figures are rough guidelines only: contact details for transport providers are given on page 70.
 Check timetables carefully in advance: not all services are daily, and in winter services may be less frequent*

Getting there and away

To plan your travel, consult suitable maps together with Table 2, which shows approximate times for reaching Blairgowrie via Perth by various methods. Bus and train times are the shortest as scheduled in 2015. Car journey times are based on driving within speed limits, making no allowance for traffic delays, with minimal fuel stops. If you arrive in Scotland by plane, you could rent a car at the airport and arrange to leave it with one of your accommodation hosts, at your own risk.

The circular nature of the walk makes car travel a convenient choice for visitors who wish to combine hiking the Trail with other activities, such as sightseeing, golf, fishing or genealogy. Nowhere on the Trail is more than 40 minutes by road from Blairgowrie – a comforting fact in the event of an emergency. Bus services in the area are sparse and many operate only on certain weekdays: see page 70 for details.

Accommodation and refreshments

There are many ways to walk the Trail: the classic approach is to start from Blairgowrie and book accommodation in Kirkmichael, Spittal, Kirkton and Alyth, reflecting the sections described in Part 3. You can arrange this yourself, using the links provided on page 70, or you can book through a holiday company



Ecocamp Glenshee, near Blacklunans

which will also provide baggage transfer. However, accommodation in Spittal has become difficult (see below), and although most other places have a choice, most B&Bs are small or very small, so groups will find the logistics of Trail accommodation challenging. The table on page 9 shows where accommodation was available in 2015.

The Spittal of Glenshee Hotel burned down in 2014: unless and until proposals to build some sort of replacement come to fruition, the only practical option is Gulabin Lodge which is booked out with groups at weekends. Although normally self-catering, it can provide food for walkers, but only if arranged when booking: phone 01250 885 255. This won't suit everybody; and the only alternative at Spittal is the expensive Dalmunzie Castle Hotel.

The main facilities along the Cateran Trail

	<i>miles from last place</i>	<i>km from last place</i>	B&B/ hotel	hostel	campsite	pub/ café	food shop/ carryout
Blairgowrie			✓		✓	✓	✓
Bridge of Cally	7.2	11.6	✓			✓	✓
Kirkmichael	8.3	13.4	✓			✓	✓
Spittal of Glenshee	8.5	13.7		✓*		✓▲	
Dalhenzean Lodge	2.7	4.3	*				
Lair	3.2	5.2				✓	
Kirkton of Glenisla	8.7	14.0	✓**			✓	✓
Alyth	10.8	17.4	✓		✓	✓	✓

Placenames in *italic* are offroute, so a small amount must be added to the distances measured along the Trail.

* see text for accommodation issues at Spittal. ▲ Gulabin Lodge café normally open in season.

** B&B also at West Freuchies under 1 mile east of Kirkton.

Another option is to walk on nearly 3 further miles along the trail and go off-route to Dalhenzean Lodge. It has only two rooms, so again advance booking is essential. As the table shows, on most sections there are no refreshments *en route*, so carry all the food and drink you need for the day.

A non-traditional approach to walking the Trail is offered by several hotels, for example in Kirkmichael, Kirkton and Alyth, whereby you stay four nights in the same place and are dropped and picked up from the ends of each section. Some hotels provide the transfers as part of the package, others direct you to the local taxi firm but offer 4-for-3 on the hotel nights. Although using transfers to overnight in the same place results in a rather different experience, it certainly simplifies booking, drastically reduces packing/unpacking and makes baggage handling redundant, so it is popular with some walkers. A further option would be to stay for two nights in each of two places, thus needing fewer transfers.

There are several further options which aren't close enough to the Trail to be included in the table but are well placed for other approaches. Some of these, such as the Ecocamp Glenshee near Blacklunans, and the Old Brewhouse, Bamff near Alyth, arrange pickups and drops for guests walking the Trail. Others such as Glenkilrie House are directly accessible from the Minitrail. We provide direct links to these, and will add others as notified, at www.rucsacs.com/links/ctt.

Glenisla Hotel

