

2 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.

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 20. 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.



Loch Lomond north of Inversnaid



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.

The islands make good nesting sites for birds



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 photo below.

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 the 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 8 m (26 feet) above sea level, rising and falling by up to 3 m (10 feet).

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



Wildlife on the loch



Osprey

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 nests on the islands. In the quieter northern parts look for rarer ducks, including goldeneye and pochard.

Fish-eating birds feast in these waters, including cormorant and diving ducks such as goosander and red-breasted merganser. You might be lucky enough to see an osprey hunting over the southern 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 the shores of Loch Lomond, see page 27.



Goosander female (foreground) with male

History

Although humans have probably lived on Loch Lomondside 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 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 are of a large enclosure within which a rectangular building was probably used for religious purposes.

Two of the loch's islands have strong religious connections: St Kessog built a monastery on Inchtavannach in the sixth century. And another Irish missionary, St Kentigerna, settled on Inchcailloch. 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



Inchcailloch burial ground

church until 1621, when it fell into decay. Burials continued on Inchcailloch until 1947, and you will see dates from 1623 onward in its burial ground. A table stone marks the grave of Gregor, Chief of Clan MacGregor and uncle of Rob Roy: see page 23..

There have been passenger boats on the loch since 1818, when the first passenger steamship started sailings, prompted by the publication of Walter Scott's novel *Rob Roy* in 1817. Completion of the railway from Bowling to Balloch in 1851 gave fresh impetus to visitor numbers. Pleasure cruises were very popular in Victorian times and piers were built at the popular lochside destinations.

Over time, boats became larger and in 1953 the *Maid of the Loch* was launched. She was the last paddle steamer to be built in Britain, and carried over 3 million passengers in her time. But holiday habits changed in the 1960s and 70s, and the Maid struggled commercially. Withdrawn in 1981, she fell into disrepair and appeared doomed. In 1996, however, she was bought by a charity and her splendid art deco interior has been renovated. The goal is to restore her engines and seaworthiness, but meantime she can be visited at Balloch Pier: www.maidoftheloch.org.



Communications

The loch forms an obvious barrier to east-west communications. Apart from the A82 trunk road along its western shore, there is only a minor road to Rowardennan from the south and a single-track road to Inversnaid from the east. And the only connection between these two is on foot, by the West Highland Way.

From Tarbet northwards, the West Highland Line railway runs along the west shore. Tarbet lies on the narrow neck of land only 30 m/100 feet high separating Loch Lomond from the sea.

This obstacle was overcome in 1263, when 40 Viking long-ships from King Haakon's fleet sailed up Loch Long, a sea loch. The Vikings then hauled their ships overland and sailed down Loch Lomond, raiding and burning.

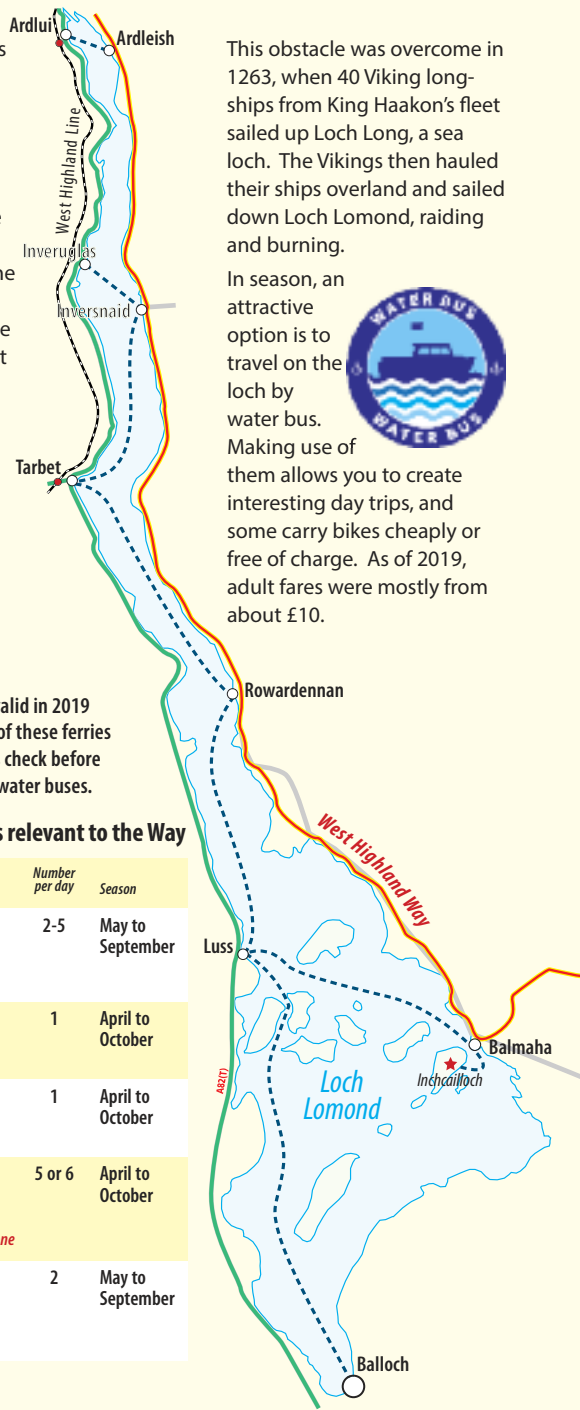
In season, an attractive option is to travel on the loch by water bus. Making use of them allows you to create interesting day trips, and some carry bikes cheaply or free of charge. As of 2019, adult fares were mostly from about £10.



Data in the table below were valid in 2019 but the season and timetable of these ferries vary from year to year. Always check before making plans that depend on water buses.

Selected water bus routes relevant to the Way

Route	Operated by	Number per day	Season
Luss-Balmaha-Luss	Sweeney's & Cruise Loch Lomond 01389 7522 376	2-5	May to September
Luss-Rowardennan-Luss	Cruise Loch Lomond 01301 702 356	1	April to October
Tarbet-Rowardennan-Tarbet	Cruise Loch Lomond 01301 702 356	1	April to October
Tarbet-Inversnaid-Tarbet	Cruise Loch Lomond 01301 702 356	5 or 6	April to October
<i>This route must be pre-booked by phone</i>			
Inveruglas-Inversnaid-Tarbet	Cruise Loch Lomond 01301 702 356	2	May to September



To reach Inchcailloch* from Balmaha, contact McFarlane's Boatyard (01360 870 214): ferries run from Balmaha year-round, weather permitting, costing £5 return in 2019.