

## Introduction

The Speyside Way runs from the coast of the Moray Firth through the heart of malt whisky country towards the foothills of the Cairngorms. Generally it follows the valley of the River Spey upstream: this is Scotland's second-longest river and certainly its most dynamic. It has created a haven for wildlife and threatened species: see pages 16-17. You pass through farms and villages full of local colour, glimpsing another way of life. The main spine of the Way runs for 85 miles (136 km) which most walkers will spread over six or seven days. Adding the optional Tomintoul spur (16 miles/25 km from Ballindalloch) brings it up to 101 miles/162 km and adds an extra day.

This is one of Scotland's Great Trails, waymarked throughout with the thistle-in-hexagon logo. It was launched in 1981 as a route from Spey Bay to Ballindalloch. By 2001, the route was extended to Buckie in the east and Aviemore in the south-west, with the Tomintoul spur added to the south. In 2009 an extension to Newtonmore was approved, but by 2015 the route had extended only by 6.4 miles to Kincaig. This edition has been published to celebrate the completion of the route to Newtonmore and its official opening later in 2021.

Following this long-distance route takes you through strands of Scotland's history as you walk in the footsteps of drovers, soldiers and clansmen. Enjoy the heritage of railways that were built by Victorians, closed in the 1960s and later reopened to walkers and cyclists. If completing the Speyside Way leaves you hungry for more, consider some linked trails. The 23-mile Dava Way connects Grantown with Forres along a former railway. If coastal walking has more appeal, the Moray Coast Trail stretches from Forres along 44 miles of splendid coastline to Cullen, overlapping the Speyside Way. Both are described in detail in a companion volume *Moray Coast Trail* which also explains the 96-mile Moray Way circuit: see inside front cover.

# 1 Planning to walk the Way

Most of the walking is straightforward, along paths, tracks and railway trackbed through splendid scenery of estuary, woods, hills and farmland. You don't need to be an experienced long-distance walker to tackle this hike. It's easier than the West Highland Way, for example, being shorter, flatter and with less rugged terrain. If you are new to long-distance walking, obtain our *Notes for novices*: see page 79. Well in advance of doing the Speyside Way, complete some day walks to test your feet, gear and 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 page 15.

This book is arranged in the recommended direction from Buckie south-west to Newtonmore. The earlier sections are flatter and have shorter daily distances, making for a gentler introduction. By the time you are approaching the Cairngorms, you'll be well into your stride for the longer sections (3-6 and 3-7). Should you decide to walk instead from Newtonmore to Buckie, you would have the prevailing wind behind you but would be walking progressively shorter sections and might find ending at Buckie something of an anticlimax. Concise directions are provided for this on pages 76-77.

Be aware that in order to optimise scale, our mapping pages have been rotated by an angle of 36° clockwise. This applies to all except pages 31-32 and the village plans, where north points straight up the page. The kilometre grid on every page may help to remind you of this. Map scale is 1:42,500.



*Autumn sunset from near Aviemore*



## How long will it take?

You can spread your walk over six to eight days, depending on the time available and what you decide about the Tomintoul spur and side-trips. The full 101 miles can be walked in seven days as described in sections 3-1 to 3-7. Each section ends at a small town or large village where you will find shelter for the night and at least one pub or restaurant and a shop. An alternative itinerary spreads the final 36 miles (58 km) over three days instead of two. Table 1 shows both 7-day and 8-day options, each shorter by a day if you omit the Tomintoul spur: see below.

Consider adding a day or two to your walking time in Speyside. First, if you have never done so before, don't miss the opportunity to tour a distillery. Even if you don't like whisky, seeing the process by

which barley, yeast and water are turned into this precious amber liquid is fascinating. Each year, over a million visitors are drawn to visit Scotland's distilleries, and your walk passes several of Speyside's finest: see pages 22-23.

Second, consider whether you want to tackle the Tomintoul spur described on page 47-54. It provides 15.6 miles (25.1 km) of rougher walking, so it's a full day, especially if you visit the Glenlivet Distillery: see page 49. This walk offers splendid Cairngorms views and more of a wilderness experience. Most people walk it uphill to Tomintoul, but read the panel on page 54 before you decide, and consider carefully how you will resume the Way. Unless you want to spend the next day walking back again, you will need either a lift or a taxi back to Ballindalloch. Alternatively, perhaps there may be a weekly Moray Council bus 364 (currently on Wednesdays) from Tomintoul to Granttown, thereby missing the Ballindalloch/Granttown section of the main Way: see the map on page 11. On termtime weekdays, a school bus connects Delnashaugh with Tomintoul (Deveron Coaches 363C) but its timing is awkward.

Third, if you are new to long-distance walking, it's a good idea to plan a day somewhere near the halfway point when walking is optional. That way, if your feet are blistered or tired, or if the weather is terrible, you can choose whether and how far to walk that day, perhaps making some visits for a change.

If you prefer the eight-day option, overnighting in Boat of Garten offers the opportunity to visit the Osprey Centre at Loch Garten. In season (April to August) it offers a wonderful experience, not to be rushed, but it does involve a 2-mile detour. There is also the temptation of riding the Strathspey Steam Railway for the six miles into Aviemore. This takes only 15 minutes – two hours less than walking. Check time of departure in advance: see the panel on page 65. Beyond Aviemore, bear in mind that accommodation in Kinraig is limited and getting an evening meal may be problematic. This can be overcome by using the local bus service linking Aviemore and Newtonmore via Kinraig.

**Table 1** 7-day option 8-day option

|                | 7-day option |            | 8-day option |            |
|----------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
|                | miles        | km         | miles        | km         |
| Buckie         | 10.7         | 17.2       | 10.7         | 17.2       |
| Fochabers      | 12.7         | 20.4       | 12.7         | 20.4       |
| Craigellachie  | 12.2         | 19.6       | 12.2         | 19.6       |
| Ballindalloch  | 15.6         | 25.1       | 15.6         | 25.1       |
| Tomintoul spur | 13.7         | 22.1       | 13.7         | 22.1       |
| Granttown      |              |            | 10.6         | 17.1       |
| Boat of Garten | 16.2         | 26.1       |              |            |
| Aviemore       |              |            | 12           | 19.3       |
| Kinraig        | 19.5         | 31.4       | 13.1         | 21.1       |
| Newtonmore     |              |            |              |            |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>101</b>   | <b>162</b> | <b>101</b>   | <b>162</b> |

Table 3 and the transport map (page 11) should help you plan how to reach the start and return from the finish, depending on your method and time of travelling from home. The map includes information about bus routes accessible along the Way.

Planning your accommodation is the first and most vital part of planning your trip. Unless relying on camping throughout, you must book long in advance: beds can be scarce, both out of season and in high summer, and location is crucial. Be aware of annual festivals: for example, the Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival normally runs in early May: see page 79.

If your visit overlaps with it, you may find B&B providers fully booked – or expecting to be, and thus reluctant to book single nights.

Note that Ballindalloch is the name of the area around the former station, not a village; search also for Cragganmore. Also be aware that some of the facilities listed in the table are very basic: for example, some free camping areas have a portaloos or directions to public toilets, and no showers. Places such as Craigellachie and Ballindalloch have a tick in the shop column because there is a Filling Station fairly nearby which stocks some basic food as well as selling fuel. Ballindalloch's café/pub tick refers to a café inside the golf club on the B9137 but opening hours vary – and so on. If you have specific needs it's best to carry your own supplies.

If booking for yourself, start by trying to get a bed in the place where it will be most difficult, then add the easier places to your itinerary. Be sure to find out if an evening meal is available. Many walkers turn to support services to organise their entire trip. For a full service including baggage transfer, accommodation and advice see page 79.

The Speyside Way official website is at [www.speysideway.co.uk](http://www.speysideway.co.uk) and lists some sources, but online searching may need to be followed up with phone calls to check availability and resolve problems.

### Pronunciation guide

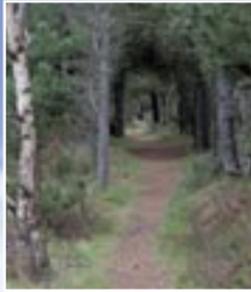
Place stress on the syllable shown in **bold**. Visitors to Scotland find the aspirated ch sound (as in *loch* or *Fiddich*) difficult: it sounds wholly different from the ch in *church*. Try asking a native to demonstrate! It's shown below as 'h.

|               |                         |             |                     |
|---------------|-------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Avon          | a'an                    | Kingussie   | kin <b>yew</b> si   |
| Carn Daimh    | carn die                | Knockando   | nok <b>an</b> doe   |
| Craigellachie | craig <b>ell</b> a 'hee | Monadhliath | moan a <b>li</b> a' |
| Dailuaine     | dall <b>yew</b> an      | Tomintoul   | tom in <b>towel</b> |
| Fochabers     | <b>fo'h</b> a bers      | Tugnet      | tug <b>net</b>      |

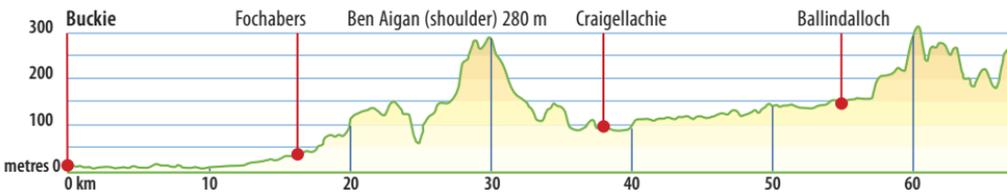
**Table 2 Facilities along the Way**

|                       | B&B/hotel | hostel/<br>bunkhouse | camping | café/pub | shop |
|-----------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------|----------|------|
| <b>Buckie</b>         | ✓         |                      | ✓       | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Spey Bay</b>       | ✓         |                      |         | ✓        |      |
| <b>Fochabers</b>      | ✓         |                      | ✓       | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Craigellachie</b>  | ✓         |                      | FREE    | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Aberlour</b>       | ✓         |                      |         | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Ballindalloch</b>  | ✓         |                      | FREE    | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Cromdale</b>       | ✓         |                      |         |          |      |
| <b>Grantown</b>       | ✓         | ✓                    |         | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Nethy Bridge</b>   | ✓         | ✓                    |         | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Boat of Garten</b> | ✓         |                      |         | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Aviemore</b>       | ✓         | ✓                    |         | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Kincraig</b>       | ✓         |                      |         | ✓        |      |
| <b>Kingussie</b>      | ✓         |                      |         | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Newtonmore</b>     | ✓         |                      | ✓       | ✓        | ✓    |
| <b>Tomintoul</b>      | ✓         | ✓                    | FREE    | ✓        | ✓    |

## Terrain, gradients and pace



The Way follows minor roads, tracks, purpose-built paths and cycleways and, of course, the trackbed of the old railway. Generally it provides sound walking underfoot. Depending on the season and recent weather, sections of the Way may be boggy, perhaps very boggy – notably between Portgordon and Spey Bay, south of Ballindalloch and on the Tomintoul spur. This will slow you down, as will having to open and close gates which are frequent in areas where livestock graze. Streams may form another kind of obstacle: stepping stones that are easy to use when the water level is low can be submerged when the stream is in spate, so sometimes you may have to look for a better spot to cross. The main route is generally fairly level where it runs close to the coast or river, with some undulating sections and gradual climbs. Section 3-2 includes a hilly stretch around the shoulder of Ben Aigan, but although the trail rises and falls a lot, it never climbs above 275 m. Section 3-5 is tougher: it undulates more and the terrain can be boggy, albeit with stepping stones in places. Overall the main Way rises from sea level to 335 m in Inshriach Forest: see the altitude profile below.





*Ben Rinnes from near Blairfindy car park*

The Tomintoul spur includes stiffer climbs over rough and exposed moorland; it climbs from 160 m to 570 m on Carn Daimh, and crosses some lesser summits en route to Tomintoul (altitude 354 m): see the altitude profile on the right.

Apart from terrain and gradient, other factors will affect your rate of travel.

The number of people in your group can have a surprisingly large effect. Groups normally travel at the pace of their slowest member, or slightly less. Good weather may encourage longer and more frequent rest stops and photo pauses. Overall, don't expect to average more than 2-2½ mph (3-4 km/hr) unless you're very fit and keen to press on.

