

Foreword

Rob Roy MacGregor was always at home in the countryside of Scotland – a superb outdoorsman as well as an educated and intelligent man.

Circumstances and ill fortune made him Scotland's most famous outlaw. His property was seized and his very surname proscribed for 40 years after his death. It is fitting that, over three centuries after his birth, a new Scottish long-distance walk was named in his honour.

An expert at moving quickly over rough country, Rob Roy also proved to be a master of the art of escape. Despite being hunted down and arrested many times, he lived to the ripe old age of 63 and died peacefully in his bed. He was buried in the graveyard at Balquhidder, where the gravestone's legend is 'MacGregor despite them'.

The route passes through many places where Rob Roy and his clansmen were active, especially around Aberfoyle and Killin. The route is steeped in clan history, Jacobite legends and tales of the Highlanders' resistance to government from London. The Way also features some interesting railway heritage and the Victorian Loch Katrine water scheme. This was the greatest achievement of municipal Scotland: it wiped out cholera overnight.

The Rob Roy Way has much to offer people from Scotland and abroad. It has been developed by enthusiasts making use of existing resources, without external funding or support. Although not an official route*, this initiative demonstrates that long walks such as this can arise from the grass roots. Rob Roy MacGregor would have approved.

The Rt Hon Sir David Steel (Lord Steel of Aikwood), 2002

*Ten years later, the route was recognised as one of Scotland's Great Trails.

The graveyard at Balquhidder where Rob Roy is buried: see page 15



1 Planning to follow the Way

The Rob Roy Way goes through many places strongly linked with Rob Roy MacGregor, Scotland's legendary outlaw: see page 13. In addition to its historic paths, railway heritage and glorious scenery, the Way is also rich in wildlife. And of great importance to hungry and thirsty trail users, it links villages with friendly hosts and historic pubs.

You don't need to be an experienced long-distance walker or cyclist to complete this route. It is easier than the West Highland Way, for example, being 17 miles (27 km) shorter, less exposed and mainly on good terrain. It has been waymarked, but in a few places navigation can be tricky and in poor visibility you may need to use a compass. Nearly 20% of its 79 miles (128 km) involves roads. Although the roads are minor, if you dislike tarmac, consider choosing another route or using transport to avoid the 8-mile (13-km) road stretch on South Loch Tay (Ardeonaig to Acharn).

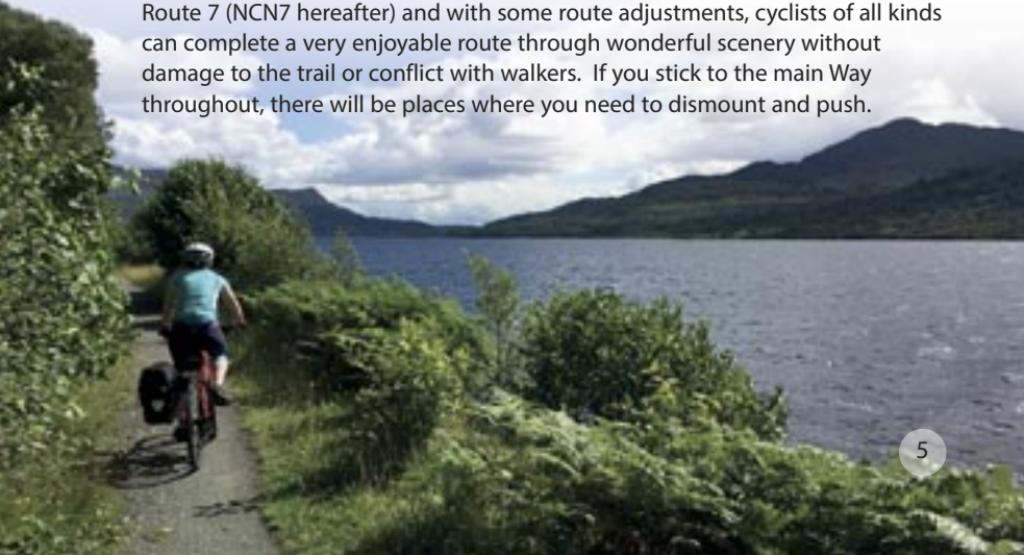
Nobody should undertake the Rob Roy Way casually, because the weather in Scotland is so unpredictable. On any given day, you may experience weather typical of any season, and perhaps of all four. This adds variety, but also makes it important to have the right gear.

This book has been written for people following the recommended direction, from Drymen* to Pitlochry. The prevailing wind in Scotland is from the south-west, so you are more likely to have the wind at your back, and there may be less rain as you move north-east. Also, the more challenging parts are around Loch Tay, by which time you'll be well into your stride. If you decide to travel southbound regardless, note various warnings about where turnings would be easy to miss.

* For a pronunciation guide, see page 79

Walk or cycle?

Your first decision is whether to walk or cycle. The Way was originally designed for walkers, but cycling, including on e-bikes, has become extremely popular. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code asserts that cyclists (and horse-riders) are entitled to use the trail provided that they do so responsibly. What this means in practice is explained by a leaflet *Do the Ride Thing* which states that cyclists should be ready to give way to walkers and horse riders, give polite early warning to other trail users and avoid damage to soft surfaces by riding on them, especially during and after wet weather. Much of the Way follows Cycle Route 7 (NCN7 hereafter) and with some route adjustments, cyclists of all kinds can complete a very enjoyable route through wonderful scenery without damage to the trail or conflict with walkers. If you stick to the main Way throughout, there will be places where you need to dismount and push.



Route options

Your main route decision is whether to stick to the main Way which runs for 79.3 miles (128 km) or whether to follow the detour through Glen Almond and Glen Quaich described in section 3.8. This adds 17 miles (27 km) to the distance overall, and for many walkers will be a step too far, adding at least one extra day and probably two. It leaves the Way at Ardtalnaig and rejoins it at the top of the Birks of Aberfeldy. At 30.4 miles/48.9 km it is too far to walk in a single day, but may be feasible for cyclists with suitable bikes and a willingness to carry in places. Note that since the hotel at Amulree closed, walkers need transport to split this over two days unless accommodation and food can be found. However it visits two lovely glens and a remote loch, cutting out a stretch of the South Loch Tay road. For some, it may be the highlight of the holiday and we recommend you to read pages 70 to 77 before deciding.

Another extension would be to begin from Milngavie (reached from Glasgow by train) and follow the waymarked West Highland Way as far as Drymen or Old Drymen Road, joining the Way at mile 3.9.

There are several places on the route where many or most cyclists will prefer to stick to smoother surfaces rather than try to follow the walking route over narrow sections with soft surfaces where you would have to dismount and push or carry. These are pointed out in the text and highlighted with a marginal mark. For example from Strathyre to Kingshouse cyclists may prefer to stay on the minor road that goes through Balquhidder and see Rob Roy's grave: see page 15.

A minor option is whether to follow the route into Callander. Bypassing it saves 2.6 miles and enables fit walkers who are short of time to hike the 16.4 miles (26.4 km) from Aberfoyle to Strathyre in a long second day: see pages 36-44. These are the easiest two sections to combine, because of the terrain and the shortcut.

Gradients, terrain and pace

Much of the Way follows cycleway and forest roads, but with a wide range of surfaces from smooth tarmac to rough, rocky and deeply rutted tracks. In places there are narrow paths which may be stony or muddy, and occasionally the Way follows a faint or invisible trod path through dense vegetation or moorland.

The Way provides some superb views without the challenge of extreme gradients. In the first three sections, you never rise above 220 m (720 ft) and only in 3.5 does the way go quite high, to 565 m/1850 ft (south-east of Creag Gharbh) with glorious views from this summit: see page 23. The profile below shows how the sections compare overall.

Walkers are likely to spread the walk over five to eight days, depending on their route choice, time available and the pace that they find comfortable. Table 1a (left columns) shows distances and overnights for the recommended 7-day walking





schedule as described in sections 3·1 to 3·7. For the six-day option, bypass Callander as explained above. If you have only five days to spare, the simplest solution would be to start at Aberfoyle instead of Drymen. You can create other variations for yourself, e.g. by overnighting in Lochearnhead and bypassing Killin, as explained on pages 47 and 48. Many other ways of splitting the distance are possible if you have access to any transport, or intend to wild camp, but we propose options that work for the unsupported walker who wants to stay at B&Bs and travel light.

Cyclists vary widely in their comfortable daily distances. This depends not only on the rider's fitness and experience, but also on the bike. Is its range of gears suitable to some steep gradients, are its tyres good for offroad traction, is it too heavy to lift over the occasional obstacle such as a stile – and is it electric? We propose a 4-day option that allows a gentler pace, and a more strenuous 3-day itinerary which is 3 miles shorter because it bypasses Callander. There are many other options and some cyclists will squeeze the Way into two days or even less.

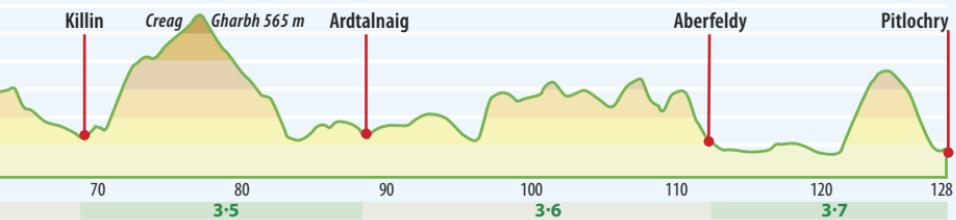
Table 1a walkers' itineraries over 7 or 6 days

| | 7-day | | 6-day | |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | miles | km | miles | km |
| Drymen | 10·8 | 17·4 | 10·8 | 17·4 |
| Aberfoyle | 9·9 | 15·9 | | |
| Callander | 9·2 | 14·8 | 16·4* | 26·4* |
| Strathyre | 13·6 | 21·9 | 13·6 | 21·9 |
| Killin | 11·9 | 19·2 | 11·9 | 19·2 |
| Ardtalanraig | 14·6 | 23·5 | 14·6 | 23·5 |
| Aberfeldy | 9·4 | 15·1 | 9·4 | 15·1 |
| Pitlochry | | | | |
| Total | 79·3 | 127·7 | 76·7 | 123·4 |

* bypassing Callander saves 2·6 miles / 4·2 km

Table 1b cyclists' itineraries over 4 or 3 days

| | 4-day | | 3-day | |
|-------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | miles | km | miles | km |
| Drymen | | | 21 | 34 |
| Callander | | | | |
| Strathyre | 26 | 42 | | |
| Killin via Balquhidder | 27 | 43 | 37 | 60 |
| Aberfeldy | 14 | 23 | 21 | 34 |
| Pitlochry via Logierait | | | | |
| Total | 88 | 142 | 85 | 137 |



Whatever you do, don't underestimate the time needed. If you're under pressure, you won't have time to linger over a glorious view, consider an interesting side-trip or simply be still enough to spot wildlife. The scenery is especially grand above Loch Tay, with the summit of the Way reached between Killin and Ardtalnaig. Consider allowing further time for side-trips up hills or mountains, from Ben Ledi to the higher mountains of the north: see pages 22-23.

What is the best time of year?

Fortunately for those who have little choice, there is no bad time of year to follow the Way. You should be prepared for cold, wet and windy weather at any time. This book was researched and photographed mainly in winter, and revisited in all seasons. If you can set off with the benefit of a recent weather forecast, winter may reward you with gin-clear visibility and more of a wilderness experience. Here are some factors to think about:

- Winter days are less flexible, because of the short hours of daylight: at this latitude they vary from 6-7 hours in late December to 17-18 in late June.
- Winter restricts your choice of visitor attractions, open mainly from April to October.
- Winter hikers are free from insect pests such as midges (small biting insects), clegs (horseflies) and ticks (bloodsuckers that can cause Lyme disease): see page 79.
- On winter timetables, public transport is less frequent.
- In summer, more tourists are around and there is pressure on accommodation; however, from October to March many B&Bs are closed for the season.

On balance, the ideal months are probably May/June and September/October. July and August are the busiest times both for tourists and midges. Having said that, many parts of the Way are peaceful and rich in wildlife year-round. Take precautions if travelling alone, especially on exposed sections: see page 23.

Accommodation and refreshments

Suggested overnight stops reflect where accommodation and food are available. Accommodation can be scarce year-round, so book well in advance (unless wild camping). Table 2 lists the main places where you may find overnight accommodation, ranging from upmarket hotels to simple, basic hostels.

If booking for yourself, tackle the most difficult location first: larger places such as Callander and Pitlochry have a wide choice so it's easy to complete the itinerary. Try checking [airbnb.co.uk](https://www.airbnb.co.uk) as well. Alternatively, use the specialist services of one of the expert tour operators who support the Way: see page 78. They normally offer baggage handling, book your accommodation and any transfers, and may also offer backup services in case of emergencies.

Table 2: Facilities along the Way

These facilities existed when we went to press in 2021; check before relying on them.

| | B&B / hotel | hostel | pub / café | food shop |
|--------------|-------------|--------|------------|-----------|
| Drymen | | | | ✓ ✓ |
| Aberfoyle | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Callander | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Strathyre | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| A84 | ✓ | | | |
| Balquhidder | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Lochearnhead | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Killin | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ardeonaig | ✓ | | | |
| Kindrochit | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Ardtalnaig | | | ✓ | |
| Kenmore | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Aberfeldy | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Grandtully | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Pitlochry | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

As of 2021, we knew of only two options for accommodation near Ardtalnaig, neither of which could offer an evening meal. Contact emails are given on page 78, along with details of low-cost options for Callander, Strathyre and Pitlochry. The photo shows a two-bed pod with shower and basic kitchen facilities. The Glen Quaich option involves a logistic challenge: unless and until the former hotel at Amulree reopens there is nowhere to stay nor find food except the Farmhouse at Corrymuck-loch. See page 70 for a possible compromise, and check online for updates: see imprint page.



Pod in garden of Holly Cottage, Ardtalnaig

Navigation, waymarking and previous experience

The origin of the Way is explained on page 78. Although you will sometimes see waymarking with the RRW logo, there are still places where you need to follow signage that may refer only to a footpath or to NCN7 rather than the Rob Roy Way. If you follow our directions and mapping closely you may have little difficulty, but bear in mind that waymarkers can become disturbed or removed by animals or humans, that vegetation often obscures them in summer and there are many different styles of waymarker to stay alert for: see photos below. Always try to keep track of your position in relation to the mapping in this book.



If you are inexperienced at long-distance routes, the Way may be suitable as your first outing, but ideally aim to go with somebody who has previous experience. Be sure to plan within your capabilities and please obtain our *Notes for novices*: see page 78.

