

The Cairngorms

The Cairngorms are the wildest and most extensive area of uplands in Britain and embrace the largest tracts of land over 600m and up to 1300m high. The climate is the closest in Britain to an arctic regime; consequently the area is of outstanding ecological importance. The greater part of the area is within Cairngorms National Park, the larger of Scotland two national parks, set aside in 2003 (see the boxed text, p376).

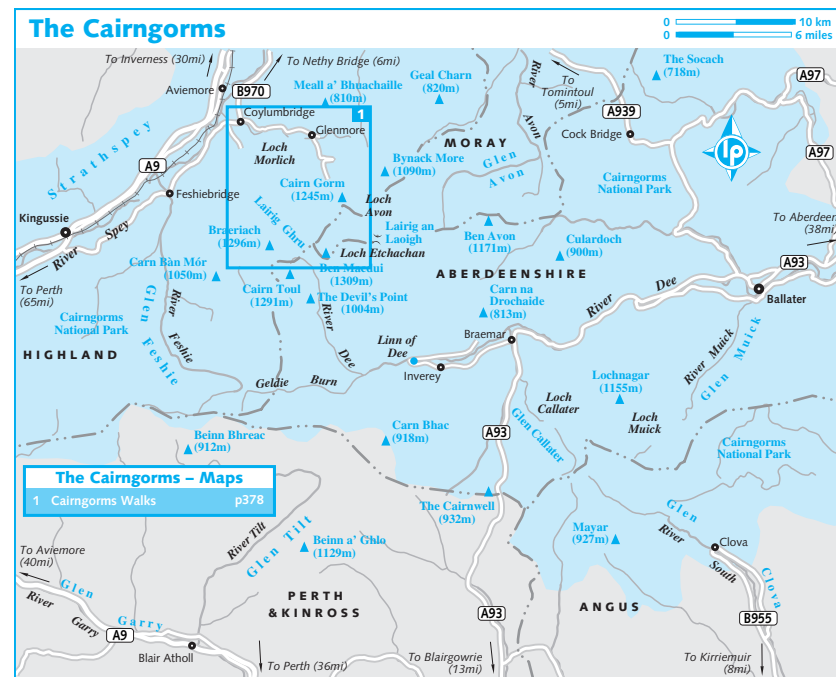
The term Cairngorms can refer to the entire area between the River Spey southeast to Braemar on the upper River Dee, but in this chapter the focus is mainly on the vast central Cairn Gorm-Macdui plateau. It's crowned by Ben Macdui (1309m), Britain's second-highest mountain, south of Cairn Gorm (1245m) peak itself. The plateau is separated from neighbouring mountain massifs by the deep gash of the Lairig Ghru in the west and the Lairig an Laoigh in the east, and is pitted with spectacular, cliff-lined corries on its northern and southern faces.

Originally the Cairngorms were called Am Monadh Ruadh, meaning 'red rounded hills' (referring to the large exposures of pinkish-red granite), but the name of the summit most visible from Strathspey was adopted in the 19th century. Oddly, Cairn Gorm means 'blue rocky mountain'.

Don't be put off if you're not keen on venturing into high places. On the northern slopes of the plateau, Rothiemurchus Estate (privately owned by the Grant family, of whisky fame) and Glenmore Forest Park (managed by the Forestry Commission) have many low-level walks, suitable for all and ideal for days when the mountains are cloud-shrouded.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Savouring magnificent views to distant horizons from **Cairn Gorm** (p377), a vast alpine plateau seemingly on top of the world
- Following centuries-old pathways through remote glens to **Lairig Ghru** (p379), the most dramatic mountain pass in Scotland
- Relaxing on the peaceful circuit of secluded **Loch an Eilein** (p382)



INFORMATION When to Walk

Since Cairngorm is Scotland's leading ski resort, it's not surprising that snow can lie here (and on the surrounding peaks) until well into May, and can return as early as late October. The season for the Lairig Ghru is slightly longer, but don't forget that hours of daylight are short between mid-October and mid-April.

Maps

Harvey's Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Cairn Gorm* covers both walks very well. The OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 36 *Grantown & Aviemore* would do as an alternative.

Books

The most comprehensive guidebook is *The Cairngorms* by Adam Watson in the Scottish Mountaineering Club's (SMC) District Guide series. Of the several walking guides covering the area, *Walks Speyside including Glenmore* by Richard Hallewell is very compact and describes 25 varied walks; in similar format, Nick Williams' *The Cairn-*

gorms outlines 40 circular walks, mostly for hardy types. John Brooks' *Cairngorms Walks* has better maps and more generous descriptions. Jim Crumley's *The Heart of the Cairngorms* is a passionate statement of the 'need for wildness' to be recognised in conservation and development proposals.

Information Sources

Cairngorms National Park (www.cairngorms.co.uk) doesn't have a dedicated tourist office; instead local tourist offices carry a selection of park publications. The website is easy to navigate and offers a mountain of information about the park's natural and cultural features, organised Countryside Events, public transport services and publications.

For accommodation bookings, contact the **Aviemore tourist office** (☎ 0845 225 5121; www.visithighlands.com; The Mall; ☎ daily). **Traveline Scotland** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.traveline-scotland.co.uk) is the most direct source of detailed public transport timetables.

Near the Cairngorm funicular's base station, and close to the Cairngorm car park and bus stop, the **Cairngorms countryside ranger**

service (☎ 01497-861703) can give expert advice about walks on the plateau; the weather forecast is posted there daily. It runs a program of guided walks in summer.

Whatever you think about the funicular (see the boxed text on p380), the website of its operator, **CairnGorm Mountain Ltd** (www.cairngormmountain.com), is worth a look.

GATEWAY

Aviemore is the natural gateway for the walks described here, and has a full range of services. It has good transport links, with daily Scottish Citylink buses from Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness, and regular First ScotRail trains from the same centres. The GNER service from London King's Cross to Inverness via Edinburgh also stops here.

This is the most popular high walk in the Cairngorms, the highlights being the summit of Cairn Gorm itself, the dramatic peaks of Stob Coire an t-Sneachda and Cairn Lochan, and the awesome corries. It can't be stressed too strongly that this walk is not a doddle. The vast plateau drops precipitously in almost all directions and severe weather is possible at any time; conditions may be fine at Glenmore but up on top it can be completely different. Inexperienced walkers should only tackle this walk in seasoned company. The side trip to Ben Macdui (p379) offers even wider views and a greater sensation of remoteness, out of sight of the northern-slope developments. The path to Ben Macdui diverges from Cairn Lochan southwest across a gap and up to the undulating plateau studded with crowds of cairns. Adding Ben Macdui makes for a full day, but one well within the scope of fit walkers.

WARNING

The Cairngorms is not the place to go for a casual stroll – the plateau is generally above 1000m. The weather is notoriously fickle, with low cloud, mist, strong wind, sleet and snow likely at any time – so always be prepared for the worst. Navigation skills are essential; the paths are well-worn but visibility can quickly deteriorate to zero and finding the way can be decidedly tricky in the absence of prominent landmarks.

CAIRN GORM HIGH CIRCUIT

Duration	4 hours
Distance	7 miles (11.5km)
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Cairngorm car park
Nearest Town	Glenmore (opposite)
Transport	bus
Summary	An outstanding mountain walk across an exposed plateau with magnificent wide-ranging views and an optional detour to Ben Macdui.

This walk can be done in either direction; it is described clockwise here, going up to Cairn Gorm from the northeast, round the rim of Coire an t-Sneachda, over Cairn Lochan then down the ridge and back to the start. Realistically, the only early escape route on the walk is down Fiacaille a' Choire Chais, the ridge between Coire Cas and Coire an t-Sneachda.

The ascent to Cairn Gorm's summit is about 645m and there's an additional climb of about 155m over Cairn Lochan. The walk isn't a particularly long day, allowing plenty of time for enjoying the views.

NEAREST TOWN Glenmore

Glenmore (7 miles from Aviemore), beside the Ski Rd up to Cairngorm, is the closest settlement to the start of the walk.

The Forestry Commission's **Glenmore Forest Park Visitor Centre** (☎ 01479-861220) concentrates on the surrounding forest park (within the national park). *Guide to Forest Walks*, available from the centre, includes maps and notes for waymarked walks in the park. There's also a **café** (breakfast £7, lunch £6, dinner £8; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Jun-Sep) here.

SLEEPING & EATING

Glenmore Camping & Caravan Site (☎ 01479-861271; sites for 2 £10) is run by the Forestry Commission. Pitches are mostly flat and well grassed; the views are superb.

Cairngorm Lodge SYHA Hostel (☎ 01479-861238; www.syha.org.uk; dm £14; 📍), in a spacious former lodge, has excellent facilities and a great outlook.

Glenmore Lodge (☎ 01479-861256; www.glenmorelodge.org.uk; s/d with shared bathroom £20/40, mains £6-10;

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

No one has ever doubted that the Cairngorms is one of Scotland's finest natural assets (which is saying a lot!) but it seemed that this compelling fact was pushed aside in wrangling over the national park boundaries. When it was opened in late 2003 (bizarrely, in a restaurant at the top of the much-opposed funicular), many felt that bureaucrats had won and the Cairngorms had lost, or at least been handed second prize. A sizeable swath of what is generally regarded as Cairngorms country, in the East Perthshire Highlands, had been left out, with the southern boundary generally following that of Highland Council. Nevertheless, the 470-sq-mile park is twice the size of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs; it has four of Britain's five highest peaks, protects 25% of Britain's threatened birds, animals and plants and is home to more than 17,000 people in seven towns.

The park does not, and will not, have a Gateway Centre after the style of Loch Lomond & the Trossachs, nor any dedicated tourist offices. Instead, its many attractive leaflets and brochures are, or should be, available from the several tourist offices within its boundaries, notably **Aviemore** (☎ 0845 225 5121; www.visithighlands.com). Again unlike Loch Lomond & the Trossachs, the Cairngorms National Park Authority does not have the last say in development issues within the park, so it remains to be seen how two of the park's four key aims are juggled: 'To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area' and 'To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities'. It's to be hoped that a coalition of Perthshire movers and shakers, led by a local MP, can win their case when the boundaries are reviewed in 2008. Meantime, the park is still incontestably the finest in Britain, judged by natural values alone.

☎ lunch & dinner), about 1 mile east of Glenmore, houses the National Sports Training Centre. The Lochain Bar has a marvellous view of the Cairngorm plateau and – when you can't see the view – stunning posters of more distant peaks. Accommodation availability depends on courses in progress.

Cas Bar (Cairngorm car park), near the funicular station, is mainly a watering hole, though it does serve snacks and light meals.

Glenmore shop (☎ 01479-861253), next to the camping site, stocks a small range of supplies and liquid fuel and gas; the local forecast is posted outside. There's an adjacent **café** (breakfast £5, lunch mains £5, dinner mains £8; ☎ lunch daily, dinner Jun-Sep).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Highland Country Buses (☎ 01463-233371; www.rapsons.co.uk) runs a service from Aviemore to Cairngorm via Glenmore (25 minutes, at least 10 daily).

By car, leave the A9 12 miles north of the Kingussie turnoff (or 7 miles south of the Carrbridge turnoff) to reach Aviemore. From here take the B970 to Coylumbridge, then the Ski Rd to Glenmore and Cairngorm car park (at Coire Cas)

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

For details of how to reach to the start by bus or car, see above.

THE WALK Cairngorm Car Park to Cairn Gorm

Map p378

1½ hours, 2 miles (3km)

Start by walking down the road, away from the car park, to a road junction and take the road to the right for about 90m to a stonework drain on the right. A small cairn marks the start of a narrow path on the other side of the ditch, parallel to the road. Follow this old track for about 200m – it becomes wider and clearer up the heather-clad slope. After a while cairns mark the route steadily up, with views unfolding of the corries and spurs of the Cairngorm plateau. The path goes beneath a ski lift and past the top of another, weaving in and out of the picket fences lining the lifts. Having left the heather behind, the path crosses gravelly ground and skirts the Ptarmigan restaurant. Beyond the restaurant a stone-paved path leads steeply up to a boulder field, where cairns and poles clearly mark the route across this minor obstacle course and up to the large summit cairn on **Cairn Gorm** (1245m), with a weather station nearby.

Among the many features in the view are the long, flat plateau of Ben Wyvis (just west of Inverness) to the north; the sprawling bulk of Ben Macdui nearby; beyond it, the sharper profile of Braeriach; and, to the southeast, flat-topped Ben Avon, its summit dotted with granite tors.

Cairn Gorm to Cairn Lochan

1 hour, 2 miles (3km)

Descend sharply west over a jumble of big boulders – initially there's no clear path – towards a wide path on clearer ground below. Then, on a broad saddle, diverge a little to the right to a prominent cairn marking the feature mapped as '1141' at the head of Fiacail a' Choirie Chais (the escape route noted earlier). From the cairn there's a great view of the crags on the eastern side of Cairn Lochan.

Follow the broad path round the rim of cliff-lined Coire an t-Sneachda, its flat floor decorated with swampy lochans (small lakes). A cairned route leads up to **Stob Coire an t-Sneachda** (Peak of the Snowy Corrie;

1176m). Drop down west to a small gap. The path to Ben Macdui (opposite) leads south from here. Otherwise, climb steeply south from here. Otherwise, climb steeply south from here. Otherwise, climb steeply south from here. Otherwise, climb steeply south from here. Otherwise, climb steeply south from here. Otherwise, climb steeply south from here.

Cairn Lochan to Cairngorm Car Park

1½ hours, 3 miles (5km)

Continue generally southwest, following a cairned route, then descend the steep, mostly rocky slope to the clearly defined path along the north-south ridge rimming the west-

ern side of Coire an Lochan. The path loses height fairly quickly down the heathery slope as it bends northeast and crosses a small stream. A well-made path takes over – you can be grateful for the huge stepping stones planted across a very boggy stretch. The excellent path leads on, making it much easier to enjoy the superb views of the northern corries, then across Allt Coire an t-Sneachda and on to the Cairngorm car park.

DOTTERELS & DEER

Not only are the Cairngorms outstandingly scenic, they are also exceptionally valuable for wildlife, especially for birds. Golden plovers, ptarmigans and dotterels may be seen on higher ground; siskins, crested tits and redpolls live in more sheltered areas and the pine woodlands on the lowermost slopes. Mountain hares also inhabit the higher ground, red and roe deer are widespread and you may even see reindeer (an introduced species) grazing high up.

SIDE TRIP: BEN MACDUI

2½ hours, 5 miles (8km), 200m ascent

Leaving the gap between Stob Coire an t-Sneachda and Cairn Lochan, follow the clear, narrow path leading south then southwest above the shallow valley of Feith Buidhe and down to a wide saddle cradling Lochan Buidhe. Snow can linger on the north-facing slope, just east of the lochan, into late summer. Beyond Lochan Buidhe you can see the dramatic cliffs of Carn Etchachan, while in the opposite direction, across the depths of the Lairig Ghru, Braeriach's magnificent corries look as if some giant hand has scooped them out of the plateau. Follow a cairned route southeast across boulders then climb the steep slope past a minor peak and on to the summit of **Ben Macdui** (1309m), marked by a lonely survey pillar. Near which is a low stone shelter and a direction indicator erected by the Cairngorm Club (Aberdeen) in 1925, identifying the features in the wide view, from Ben Nevis and Creag Meagaidh (west), to Lochnagar (east) and Ben More Assynt (north).

To return to the Cairn Gorm High Circuit route, retrace your steps to the saddle at Lochan Buidhe. From here, keep to the left or westerly path over the broad spur, then

it's down – with an awesome view straight into the Lairig Ghru, overlooked by rugged Lurcher's Crag. Follow this path back to Cairngorm as described in the main route.

CHALAMAIN GAP & THE LAIRIG GHRU

Duration	6 hours
Distance	13 miles (20.8km)
Difficulty	moderate-demanding
Start	Sugar Bowl car park
Finish	Coylumbridge (p380)
Transport	bus

Summary An energetic walk into the finest mountain pass in Britain, following rocky paths and crossing boulder fields, with a choice of return routes.

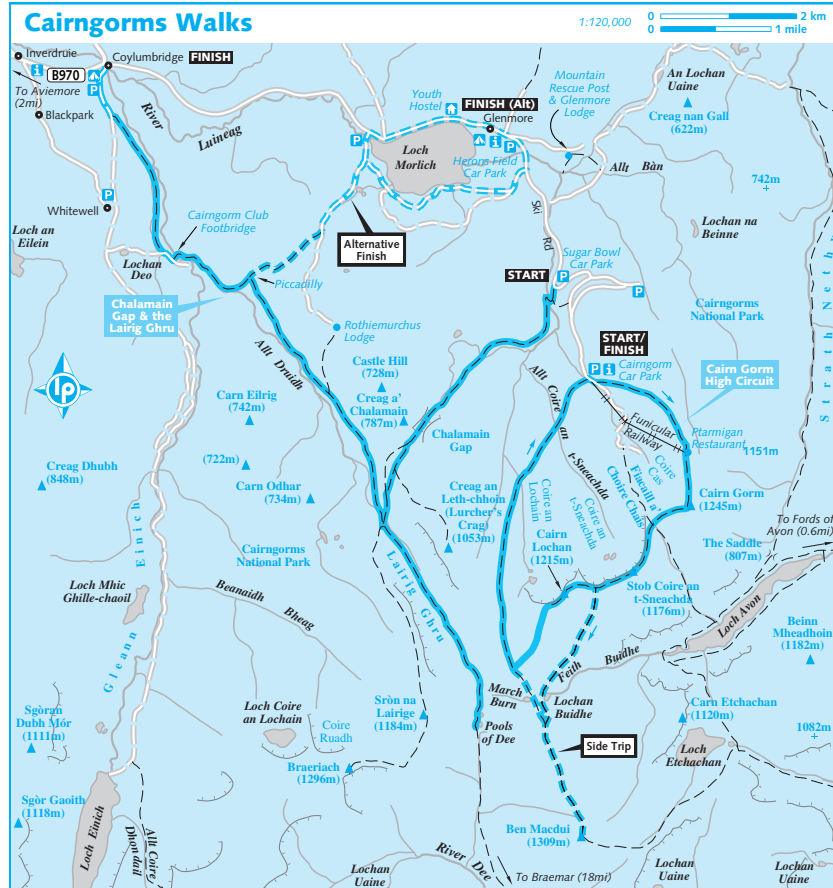
The Lairig Ghru is generally regarded as the finest mountain pass in Britain and is accessible only to walkers. It was cut by a massive glacier slicing right through the mountain mass, and provides a natural route from Strathspey to Upper Deeside. Lairig Ghru means 'Pass of Druie' – the stream that drains its northern side. It has been used for centuries for trade and cattle droving and is a public right of way. Traditionally, people walked the full distance from Aviemore to Braemar (28 miles) but these days many start from Coylumbridge or Glenmore. At the southern end there's nothing for it but to walk right into Braemar. It's possible to do this in a day, or you could carry a tent, spreading the journey over two days. There is accommodation in and near Braemar.

PLANNING

The walk is a day's outing, through the dramatic Chalain Gap and up to the top of the Lairig Ghru, then back to Coylumbridge through Rothiemurchus pine woodlands. The best way to do the walk is from Sugar Bowl car park, starting at a point higher than the finish. Crossing Chalain Gap involves a climb of 240m and it's another 225m up to the top of the Lairig Ghru.

Alternatives

One possible alternative for the return is to walk back to Herons Field car park on the Ski Rd near Glenmore, a distance of 15 miles; the Forestry Commission charges £1 for the use of this car park.



THE CAIRNGORM FUNICULAR

During the 1960s, the northern (and eastern) slopes of the Cairngorms were opened up for downhill skiing with the building of a road from Glenmore into Coire Cas. From there chair lifts ascended via an intermediate station to Ptarmigan, the top station at 1080m. However, the lift was often closed by the strong winds that regularly buffet the plateau.

In 1994 the Cairngorm Chairlift Company proposed a funicular railway similar to those operating in continental European alpine resorts. It would be more reliable and comfortable certainly, and it would, they said, attract up to 100,000 visitors annually, twice then-current numbers. Many jobs would be created and the local economy would thrive.

Walkers, mountaineers and conservation groups protested that the environmental impact of the development would be disastrous in an area of supreme ecological and scenic importance, that it couldn't possibly be economically viable and would probably drive visitors away rather than draw them in. What's more, snowfalls seemed to be on the decline.

Nevertheless, financial backing was secured, Scottish Natural Heritage sanctioned the proposal (subject to mandatory access restrictions to protect adjacent European Union-designated conservation areas) and the Scottish Executive approved the proposal. To minimise the visual impact of the funicular and its support columns, the top 250m of the track to the Ptarmigan Visitor Centre goes through a shallow tunnel, blasted out of the hillside.

The funicular and base station facilities opened in December 2001, and the Ptarmigan Visitor Centre and restaurant the following spring. Cairngorm Mountain Ltd, the operating company, undertook to plough money back into the ski area, including footpath repair and construction.

One very big string was attached to the European funding – the funicular railway must operate as a closed system during summer, to ensure the increased number of visitors doesn't cause severe damage to the fragile mountain environment. This means that between 1 May and 30 November funicular riders are not allowed out onto the mountain, their experience being confined to the displays in the visitor centre and what they can see from the viewing platform and the funicular carriage. Access on foot to the summit is now from the Cairngorm car park in Coire Cas only.

Opponents of the funicular were not amused when the Ptarmigan restaurant was chosen as the site for the official opening of the not-uncontroversial Cairngorms National Park in September 2003, and several who were invited boycotted the ceremony. It remains to be seen whether the summer access restriction withstands commercial pressures as visitor numbers have fallen way short of the optimistic forecasts.

Alternatively, you can reach the Ski Rd near the western end of Loch Morlich via the Rothiemurchus Estate road, although car parking here is less satisfactory. The distance for this version is 12.8 miles. An outline of these alternatives is on opposite.

NEAREST TOWNS Coylumbridge & Inverdrue

These two places, between Glenmore and Aviemore, are both very small but do have a few facilities.

Rothiemurchus Visitor Centre (☎ 01479-812345; www.rothiemurchus.net; Inverdrue) is run by Rothiemurchus Estate and provides information about the estate, including guided walks led by the estate's own rangers. Under the same roof is the **Farm Shop & Larder**, stocked with seriously tempting Scottish goodies.

Rothiemurchus Camp & Caravan Park (☎ 01479-812800; Coylumbridge; sites for 2 £10) is set in pine woodland beside the Lairig Ghru path.

Junipers B&B (☎ 01479-810405; Inverdrue; s/d £28/50) is welcoming and comfortable.

The **Einich** (☎ 01479-812334; Inverdrue; mains £7-14; ☺ lunch daily, dinner Wed-Sat), next to the visitor centre in an old stone building, is a pleasantly informal restaurant. Local produce is to the fore on the small menu; the soup is second-to-none.

For public transport to Inverdrue and Coylumbridge, see p377.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts at the Sugar Bowl car park, on the northeastern side of the Ski Rd, 1.75 miles from Glenmore village. If you're using public transport, the Highland

Country Buses service passes the car park (see p377), although the driver will probably stop below the car park for safety's sake. The same service will stop in Glenmore and Coylumbridge on its way down the mountain.

At the end of the walk, there's a small roadside car park nearby.

THE WALKP378 Map p378 Sugar Bowl Car Park to Allt Druidh

1¼ hours, 3 miles (5km)

From the car park, cross the road and follow the path down to a footbridge across Allt Mór. Climb up to the right, then, on the rim of the bank, veer left along a paved path and continue past a sign warning that you're entering a wild mountainous area, across moorland. The views here are fantastic, taking in the deep corries and sharp spurs of the northern face of the Cairngorm plateau.

The path dips to cross a small stream then climbs to cross the narrow **Chalamain Gap**. Clamber over the boulders filling its narrow cleft, keeping to the lowest level to avoid the peaty, heathery slopes. It's an eerily quiet place, where rock falls seem to happen frequently. On the far side there are magnificent views across the Lairig Ghru to mighty Braerich and the cairn-topped Sgòran Dubh Mór beyond. The wide, rocky and occasionally wet path crosses a shallow valley then descends steeply to the Lairig Ghru path beside Allt Druidh.

Allt Druidh to Pools of Dee

1¼ hours, 2 miles (3km)

The path crosses the stream on enormous boulders and climbs the heathery slope, then emerges onto more open ground, but still with the steep slopes towering above, their cliffs scoured by glaciers eons ago. Elongated mounds of moraine, left behind by the retreating glaciers, partly block the valley as you climb towards the pass. The path is marked by occasional cairns; follow these carefully, keeping to the left (east) for the final stretch to the crest. Ahead, the rugged peaks of Cairn Toul and the Devil's Point come into view. Continue for another 500m or so to the **Pools of Dee** – the headwaters of the River Dee – from where you can look far down the southern side of the Lairig Ghru.

Pools of Dee to Piccadilly

2 hours, 5 miles (8km)

Retrace your steps to the point where you joined the Lairig Ghru path and continue downstream from here. The rough path crosses steep, rocky slopes, with Allt Druidh far below in a deep trench cut through the moraine. Continue past a path to the right (to Rothiemurchus Lodge), with fine views of the Monadhliath Mountains on the western side of Strathspey and Meall a' Bhuachaille above Loch Morlich. After just over 1 mile you meet some beautiful Scots pines, the outliers of the Caledonian pine woodland and a precious remnant of the great forests that once covered much of the Highlands. The path junction, known unofficially as Piccadilly, has direction signs to Aviemore (to the left/west) and Loch Morlich (to the right/east).

Piccadilly to Coylumbridge

1 hour, 3 miles (5km)

Follow the track towards Aviemore, beside Allt Druidh, past a stream junction and down to the fine footbridge, built in 1912 by the Cairngorm Club, over Allt na Beinne Moire (mapped as Am Beanaidh). A short distance further on, bear right along a path to Coylumbridge. This leads through dense pines then more-open pine woodland (where the displays of purple heather in August are magnificent), across small burns and through gates. Pass a path to the left (to Gleann Einich) and continue along the broad track, past Rothiemurchus Camp & Caravan Park, to the road at Coylumbridge. There is a small roadside car park to the left.

ALTERNATIVE FINISH: GLENMORE

1¼ hours, 3 miles (5km)

Here we describe two alternative routes to Glenmore, one via Loch Morlich and the other via Herons Field. For both, turn right off the main route at Piccadilly, along the wide path towards Loch Morlich. This leads through pine woodland to a high deer fence, just beyond which you meet the wide gravel road to Rothiemurchus Lodge. Bear left and continue along the gravel road for nearly 1 mile to an unsignposted junction.

To reach the Ski Rd near the western end of Loch Morlich from here, just continue ahead for 300m. There is some roadside car

parking here and there's a Forestry Commission car park 200m to the right, where the fee is £1. Glenmore village is 1.25 miles east along the road.

For Herons Field, follow the path from the unsignposted junction to a footbridge across a small burn, then go through a tall gate (where you leave Rothiemurchus Estate and enter Glenmore Forest Park) and left along a wide forest track, skirting the shore of Loch Morlich to the south. Near its eastern end, turn left along a path marked with a red-banded post. Follow the route marked with these posts north and east through cleared land and pines to the Herons Field car park. Sugar Bowl car park, at the start of the walk, is 1.25 miles south along the Ski Rd, while Glenmore is 600m to the east.

MORE WALKS

NORTHERN CAIRNGORMS Braeriach

Braeriach (1296m), meaning 'Brindled Upland', is Britain's third-highest peak. It's the culmination of a great undulating plateau, with the Lairig Ghru on its precipitous eastern side and its western flank rising steeply from lonely Gleann Einich. For Munro enthusiasts there is also Sgor an Lochain Uaine (1258m) and Cairn Toul (1291m).

The climb starts only after a fairly long walk in from the Whitewell car park. The distance is 18.75 miles (30km) and the ascent 1000m; allow about nine hours. The best map is the Harvey Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Cairn Gorm*. The SMC's guide *The Cairngorms* is an invaluable reference.

For a misty overcast day, the walk into Loch Einich and back is well worth doing by itself.

Meall a' Buachaille

This shapely hill (the name means 'Shepherd's Hill') overlooks Glenmore and Loch Morlich and gives superb views of the whole Cairngorm plateau and Braeriach from its summit (810m). A path waymarked with orange-banded posts leads north from behind the Glenmore Forest Park Visitor Centre; the route to the summit is easy to follow. To make a circular walk, continue east to Ryvoan Bothy then follow the vehicle track down past beautiful An Lochan Uaine (Green Lake), back to Glenmore village. Allow three hours for this 6-mile (9.5km) walk, which includes 480m of climbing. It is covered by the Harvey Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Cairn Gorm* and the OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 36 *Grantown & Aviemore*.

Loch Avon

Dramatically beautiful Loch Avon is almost surrounded by cliffs – the precipitous slopes

of the Cairngorm plateau to the north, and Carn Etchachan (1120m) and Beinn Mheadhoin (1182m) to the south. It is the highlight of this long, generally low-level walk round the eastern side of an outlier of the plateau. Parts of the route can be very wet, so keep this walk for a dry spell. The distance is 21 miles (34km), with 470m of ascent; allow around nine hours. Alternatively, take two days, pitching a tent near the tiny Fords of Avon refuge, a windowless stone hut. This would allow time for climbing Bynack More (1090m) and Beinn Mheadhoin nearby. Both the Harvey Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Cairn Gorm* and the OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 36 *Grantown & Aviemore* cover the walk.

SOUTHERN CAIRNGORMS

Looking south and southeast from the summit of Cairn Gorm, you can see a host of broad-backed hills, many of which are separated by long, deep glens. There's enough high- and low-level walking here to occupy several weeks.

The Lairig Ghru walk (p379) can be extended via Derry Lodge to Braemar on the River Dee. It also links with a right of way southwards through Glen Tilt to the village of Blair Atholl (on the A9 and the

railway), and another that you can follow west through Glen Feshie to finish up at Kingussie in Strathspey.

On the eastern side of the Cairn Gorm plateau there's a long-established route, accessible from Glenmore, via the River Nethy and the Fords of Avon through Lairig an Laoigh to Derry Lodge and the Linn of Dee near Braemar. Thus it's possible to circumnavigate the plateau via Lairig Ghru to Derry Lodge and Lairig an Laoigh.

Further east in Deeside, and south of the town of Ballater, are Lochnagar (1155m) and Loch Muick, both deservedly popular walks.

Two Harvey Superwalker 1:25,000 maps cover this area – *Cairn Gorm* and *Lochnagar*. You can also use the OS Landranger 1:50,000 maps No 36 *Grantown & Aviemore*, 43 *Braemar & Blair Atholl* and 44 *Ballater & Glen Clova*. For information visit the **Braemar tourist office** (☎ 01339-741600) and **Ballater tourist office** (☎ 01339-755306).

SPEYSIDE WAY

This long-distance path links Aviemore with Buckie on the north coast and generally follows the course of the River Spey. An outline of this varied route is given p427.

LOCH AN EILEIN

Secluded Loch an Eilein, part hidden in tall forest, sits at the foot of a long ridge northwest of the main Cairngorms massif, within both the Rothiemurchus Estate and Cairngorms National Park. Well-made paths through birch and pine woodland provide an easy 3-mile (5km) circuit of the beautiful loch, which should pleasantly occupy around 1½ hours. To reach the start follow the B970 southwest from Inverdrue (on the Aviemore–Glenmore road) for about 1 mile to the signposted turnoff to Loch an Eilein. The parking area is 1 mile further on; the fee is £2. For more information call at the Rothiemurchus Visitor Centre (p380) in Inverdrue.

By doing the circuit anticlockwise, you can call at the small **tourist office** (☎ Easter-0ct) before you really get going, and learn something of what you'll be seeing during the walk. From the car park, follow a wide path south to the tourist office; the large, partly grassed mound nearby is the remains of a lime kiln. Continue south along the track, close to the shore, and soon the islet that gave the loch its name comes into view, monopolised by the brooding grey ruins of a 14th-century castle. Further on, close to the path on the left, is a memorial to Walter Rice, who drowned while skating here in 1882, reputedly because he misjudged the thickness of the ice. From the end of the track, a path leads on to the left. Beyond the bridged crossing of the stream joining nearby Loch Gahmna to Loch an Eilein, the path leads along the eastern shores, and there are more good views of the castle. At the northern end of the loch, bear left along a shoreline path to the tourist office and turn right to reach the car park.

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