



Glen Lyon – day trip

The loveliest of countryside, matched with an arts and crafts village and tea at the Post Office!

Scotland's longest enclosed glen – Glen Lyon – starts with Europe's oldest living thing, the Fortingall yew; to reach these you will be driving past Britain's longest river, The River Tay (120 miles) and all just 6 miles west of Aberfeldy.

Sir Walter Scott described Glen Lyon as the “longest, loneliest and loveliest glen in Scotland”. You will be driving along a single track road, so don't be in rush, and for 32 miles you will go from the cosy green depths to the startlingly grand vistas of upland Scotland. In one drive, it will feel like you have seen the whole of Scotland. Your drive starts in the unusual village of Fortingall, where the oldest living object grows – it's anything from 3,000 to 9,000 years old and today's relics and offspring are an impressive reminder of man's place in the history of Scotland.

The attractive village of Fortingall, with its large hotel adjoining the churchyard, was built in 1890-91 by ship-owner and Member of Parliament, Sir Donald Currie (1825–1909), who bought the Glenlyon Estate, including the village, in 1885. It was designed by the architect James M. MacLaren (1853–90). The thatched cottages are notable examples of a planned village built in the vernacular style (here combining both Lowland Scottish and English influences, notably from Devon) and are increasingly appreciated as one of the most important examples of 'arts and crafts' style in Scotland.

The Fortingall Hotel, recently restored to its original appearance (2006–07), is an important example of the Scottish vernacular revival. Based on the tower-houses and burgh architecture of the 16th and 17th centuries, but in a modern form which anticipates the buildings of Charles Rennie Mackintosh, whose work was influenced by MacLaren. Stop off in the village and have a wander round, it's a photogenic sight probably best seen in the morning light but long summer evenings make tea or dinner in the hotel a welcoming idea.

The area immediately surrounding Fortingall has one of the richest concentrations of prehistoric archaeological sites in Scotland, including a 'Cairn of the Dead', a re-used bronze Age tumulus that was used as a burial ground in the 14th century and a focus for the village's Samhain festival. Other sites include standing stones, 'four-poster' stone settings, 'ring-forts' (massive Iron Age house enclosures), many cup and ring marked stones (including one dug-up and preserved in the churchyard) and an extremely well-preserved medieval homestead moat, thought by early antiquarians to be of Roman origin because of its regular shape. Once a year, in the summer, there is an archaeological festival and a separate art festival (see our events calendar on the website).

Driving on up the glen, do stop at the roadside stopping spaces and the area is crisscrossed with low and easy walks, as well as high and loner walks. About three-quarters of the way up there is a post office that serves tea, but closes by 4.00pm even in the summer, so don't leave it too late! There is no through road unless you have a rough terrain vehicle, so you will be coming back down the way you came – but the light and even the weather will be different. Some of the strong and the brave do the route on bicycles and taking a walk in the area is a must. The Tourist Office in the square at Aberfeldy has walking maps.

At the Bridge of Balgie, turn left and take the hill road across the shoulder of Ben Laws and return to Aberfeldy by Loch Tay (using the A827). There is a National Cycle Route (number 7) that runs along the quiet southern shore for 15 miles between Killin and Kenmore. If you are looking for a picnic spot or leisure cruises, go to Dalerb. At Kenmore, seek out the Scottish Crannog Centre for a fascinating visit to a reconstructed house on stilts from the Stone Age. The courtyard restaurant and café/bar and shop have good food and a wide selection of Scotland-themed gifts. There is also a delicatessen, so you might even pick up something for supper back at Errichel.