



TIMBERBUSH
TOURS

LOCH NESS, GLENCOE and the HIGHLANDS – Glasgow

We will leave the centre of Glasgow, crossing the impressive **Erskine Bridge**, over the River Clyde, and into open countryside. After driving through the town of **Dumbarton**, whose history goes back about 2000 years, we come to **Loch Lomond**. This is the third longest (37 km) & third deepest loch in Scotland and also has the largest surface area of any loch or lake in Britain. On the far side of the loch is **Ben Lomond**, the most southerly of Scotland's mountains. Loch Lomond is wide at its southern end (8 km) but becomes narrow in its northern half. It has also has 37 islands.

We will make a stop at **Luss**, an attractive small village on the shore of Loch Lomond. There is a pleasant short circular walk through the village, down to the lochside and then along the beach and back to the car-park: there is also a café & shop.

We continue our drive up the west side of the loch into attractive **Glen Falloch** (a glen is the name we use for a narrow valley). Soon we reach the village of **Crianlarich** which is an important rail junction - the trains from Glasgow divide here with one section going west to an attractive little fishing & ferry port called Oban while the rest of the train goes north to Fort William. Look out for the signposts which from now on give the names of towns in both Gaelic & English.

At the next village, **Tyndrum**, the road divides and we head north into a very sparsely populated area. For a short distance our road runs parallel to the railway line and also the **West Highland Way**, a 152 km walk that goes from the north side of Glasgow to Fort William over beautiful countryside and is very popular. Soon pretty **Loch Tulla** comes into view and then we climb up onto **Rannoch Moor**, a vast desolate area of moorland, small lochs & boulders that extends for a long way to the east (to the right of the road) while to the west are impressive mountains.

Now we are approaching **Glencoe**, the best known of all Scottish glens and full of atmosphere – beautiful, mysterious or menacing, depending on the weather and the light. We pass the road to one of Scotland's five ski centres then drive round the base of **Buachaille Etive Mor** ("the great shepherd of Etive" in Gaelic), the impressive mountain that guards the east end of the glen and is very popular with climbers. Soon we reach the narrow part of Glencoe where there are three mountains on the



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left, all similar to each other and called the Three Sisters of Glencoe while up on the right is the Aonach Eagach ridge ("the notched ridge").

It was here in the winter of 1692 that the Glencoe Massacre took place. Under orders from the government, a troop of the Campbell clan massacred 38 of the Macdonalds of Glencoe even though they had been given hospitality by the Macdonalds for 12 days beforehand. Even today the Campbell name is remembered for their treachery and their abuse of the hospitality they had received. Near the west end of the glen there's a hotel where there is a notice saying that Campbells are not welcome !

Beyond Glencoe we come to two *sea-lochs*, Loch Leven & Loch Linnhe and at the north end of the latter is Fort William. A fort was built here by the government in 1690 to house soldiers to police this part of the highlands. The fort was demolished in 1855 but the town grew in size (population 10,000) and it is the largest on the west side of Scotland north of the Glasgow area: behind it is Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in Britain at 1344 m.

As we leave Fort William you may see huge pipes on the mountain-side : these bring water from Loch Treig, 24km away, to an aluminium smelter in the town. There is also the Ben Nevis Distillery while opposite the distillery is a road leading to Mallaig, a small fishing and ferry port. A railway line also goes between Fort William and Mallaig and that rail journey has been voted the most beautiful in the world by an independent travel magazine!

Just beyond the village of Spean Bridge stands the impressive Commando Memorial, built in 1952 and dedicated to commandos killed during World War 2. They were a highly trained unit of the British Army who did much of their training in the area west of here before being dropped by parachute into enemy-held parts of Europe.

Soon we drive into the Great Glen, a major geological fault line cutting across the Highlands from Fort William to Inverness. It is 96 km long and has 3 lochs. In the first half of the 19thc. a huge engineering project linked the lochs together by canals and also linked the lochs to the open sea on the east & west sides of Scotland, thereby providing a short-cut for ships. It is called the Caledonian Canal and



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was designed by a famous Scottish engineer, Thomas Telford. We will cross over the canal 4 times on our drive up the Great Glen and it may be that we will have to stop at least once when the bridge over the canal opens to allow boats through.

After driving alongside **Loch Lochy** and then **Loch Oich** we reach the village of **Fort Augustus** at the south end of Loch Ness. A fort was built here in the first half of the 18thc. and like Fort William its purpose was to prevent Highland clans rising up against the government. When the fort was no longer needed it was demolished and a large Benedictine Abbey was later erected on the same site. As we drive over the canal in the middle of the village you can see five locks which allow boats to go up or down between higher & lower levels.

We now drive up the whole length of the famous **Loch Ness** so keep watching out for **Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster!** The loch is 37 km long and is the second deepest in Scotland. There have been regular sightings of Nessie, the first recorded one being in 565. She is thought to be a plesiosaur and to be about 18 metres long with one large hump, a long neck (1.8 m) and a small head. There have been many scientific expeditions, some using mini-submarines and sonar, looking for evidence of our world-famous monster.

We drive through **Invermoriston** and as we cross the river you will have a lovely view downriver if you are on the right of the bus while those on the left will see a very fine old bridge, built in 1813. Soon we reach **Urquhart Castle**, large and ruined but still very impressive, on the edge of the loch. Built in the 13thc., it changed hands several times over the next 400 years and it is around here that Nessie has been seen most often. You will have the option of spending time at the castle and its Visitor Centre, followed by a 30 minute boat trip to rejoin the bus further up the loch. **Alternatively** you can go for a 60 minute circular cruise from further up the loch (photos of the castle but no stop) **or** just relax (walk, shop & café available). *

Beyond Loch Ness we come to **Inverness**, 'Capital of the Highlands' and the only town of any size in the north of Scotland. It lies beside the Moray Firth, part of the North Sea, and the river Ness flows through it with a 19thc. castle up above the river. Here we do a complete change of direction so that when we leave Inverness we are driving southwards on our return journey to Edinburgh.



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Out of sight, just east of Inverness, is **Culloden Moor** where, on 16th April 1746, the Jacobite dream of regaining the throne following the exile of King James II, came to an end with a very heavy defeat for Bonnie Prince Charlie's army (he was James' grandson) by a government force. The Battle of Culloden was the last battle to be fought on British soil.

We will climb up over the Slochd pass where it is claimed the last wolf was killed in Scotland in 1743 and soon the impressive **Cairngorm mountain range** will come into view in the distance. It is now part of a national park and five of the six highest mountains in Britain are here : it also has the largest of our five ski centres.

Further on we pass **Ruthven Barracks** on the left on its small hill. In olden times there was a castle here but the ruined structure that you can see was built in 1719 to house government soldiers. We will also pass the village of **Dalwhinnie** where there is a large whisky distillery.

Further on comes **Blair Castle** on the left - it is home to the Duke of Atholl, the only person in Britain allowed to keep a private army (about 100 strong, it is only for ceremonial occasions !) Next we drive above a deep gorge, the **Pass of Killiecrankie** where a battle took place in 1689, before driving into **Pitlochry**, a very pleasant town where we may make a short stop. It has two distilleries, a brewery, a theatre and a large dam alongside which is a salmon ladder (a series of pools) to allow salmon to get above the dam on their journey up-river. As we drive on we pass close to **Dunkeld**, an attractive little town that sits beside the river Tay, Scotland's longest river and beside Dunkeld is the smaller village of **Birnam** which featured in 'Macbeth', one of William Shakespeare's most famous plays.

Soon we come to the city of **Perth**: close by is **Scone Palace** and beside it is Moot Hill where, for several centuries, new Scottish kings were crowned while sitting on a large flat stone called the '**Stone of Destiny**'. First used in 1057, the Stone was stolen by King Edward I of England in 1296 and placed below the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey in London, until being returned to Scotland in 1996. It is now on display in Edinburgh Castle alongside the '**Honours of Scotland**', Scotland's crown jewels – a crown, sword & sceptre, all dating back to the 15th & 16th c. The last king to be crowned at Scone was King Charles II in 1651.



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At Perth we turn westwards and drive past Gleneagles, home to the 2014 Ryder Cup golf match between Europe and the USA. We now approach **Stirling** which was known in days gone by as the 'Key to the Kingdom' because of its geographical position close to the centre of Scotland - it was said that to control Scotland in olden days you had to control Stirling. Dominating the town is **Stirling Castle** which sits high on a large volcanic rock. Prominently sited on a hill close to Stirling is the **Wallace Monument**, built in the 1860's to commemorate our great freedom fighter, **William Wallace**, who led an army against the English and defeated them at the **Battle of Stirling Bridge** in 1297. He was immortalised in the 1995 film 'Braveheart'

Just south of Stirling, on the left, is the site of the **Battle of Bannockburn** where, in 1314, a Scottish army under **King Robert the Bruce** won a crucial victory against the English. A burn is a Scottish term for a small river and we will drive over the Bannock Burn.

We are now on our way back to Glasgow. On the way we will see a very impressive sculpture on the right. It is 10 metres high and is called **Arria** – it represents the mother of a Roman Emperor in the second century called **Antonine**: at that time the Romans occupied part of Scotland and built a huge wall across the country which they named after him.

Glasgow will come into view soon. It is the largest city in Scotland and the industrial heartland of the country although Edinburgh is the capital.

* The visit to Urquhart Castle and the cruise are both optional extras – the cost for them is not included in the price you have paid for the tour.