



TIMBERBUSH
TOURS

LOCH NESS, GLENCOE & THE HIGHLANDS

Our tour begins very close to the famous Edinburgh Castle and at the top end of the '**Royal Mile**', the main street of Edinburgh's Old Town. Everyone used to live on this street and the ones leading off it until the building of the 'New Town' which began in 1770. The Royal Mile goes downhill past many interesting & impressive sights before ending at the **Palace of Holyroodhouse**, home to the kings & queens of Scotland, and now the United Kingdom, for 500 years. Opposite it is the **Scottish Parliament**, opened in 2004.

We leave the Royal Mile and soon pass a cemetery on the right: there is a round guardhouse there dating back to an infamous period of grave robbing in the early 19thc. when men would dig up dead bodies and get well paid for them by the professor of anatomy at the university who used them in large public dissection demonstrations. A little further on we pass Murrayfield Stadium on the right where Scotland play their international rugby matches. As we make our way out of Edinburgh the Pentland Hills will appear away to the left if the clouds are not too low – they mark the southern boundary of the city and extend for 32 km going from east to west.

After leaving Edinburgh we join a motorway which heads north-west and soon we pass **Linlithgow Palace** on the left, partly hidden by trees. It was used by the kings of Scotland and dates back to 1425 in the reign of King James I, although later kings added to it. Our most famous queen, **Mary Queen of Scots**, was born here in 1542. Now largely ruined, it is still very impressive, standing on a small hill above a loch (the Scottish word for a lake).

Soon afterwards **Grangemouth** can be seen off to the right – this is Scotland's main oil refinery and also our largest container port. Further on, to the left, we pass **Falkirk** which was the site of two major battles in 1298 & 1746. It is also home to the **Falkirk Wheel**, a massive rotating boat lift built in 2002 that transfers boats between two canals that are 35 metres apart in height (it is not visible from our motorway). Also in this area are remains of the **Antonine Wall**, a 63 km long wall across the country, built by the Romans in the 2ndc. during their 100 year occupation of part of what is now Scotland – its purpose was to try and hold back the northern tribes who caused the Romans considerable unrest.

Just before **Stirling** we pass on the right the site of the **Battle of Bannockburn**. In 1314, a Scottish army, led by **King Robert the Bruce**, won a crucial victory over the English during the Wars of Independence when we had to fight for our very existence against invading armies from England. A burn is a Scottish term for a small river and we will drive over the Bannock Burn.



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We now reach **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'.

At Stirling we leave the motorway and head west. Soon we cross over the river Teith and as we do so, on the right, is the very imposing **Doune Castle**. Built in the 14th c. by the Duke of Albany, it is so strong that it was only ever captured once. It took on a new fame when it was used in the very popular film 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail' in 1975, as well as the TV series '**Outlander**' in 2014.

We drive through **Callander** then perhaps stop for a coffee at Kilmahog where you may get the chance to see some **Highland cattle** – these are our famous 'hairy coos' with their thick, shaggy coats that cover their eyes and long horns. At Kilmahog there is a road off to the west to the **Trossachs**, a beautiful area of lochs, rivers, small mountains & forests. However, we drive on, into the narrow Pass of Leny and it is here we enter the Highlands. We will pass a tiny family cemetery where some of the ancestors of **President William McKinlay** are buried: he was the last but one President of the US to be assassinated, in 1901. Now we come to our first loch, **Loch Lubnaig**. Lubnaig means 'bent or curved' in Gaelic which is the other language that has been spoken in Scotland for many centuries. Gaelic was brought to Scotland by Irish immigrants who settled on the west coast of Scotland and on the islands where the language is still strongest, although only 60,000 people still speak it.

After passing the end of another loch, **Loch Earn**, we climb up through pretty **Glen Ogle** (a glen is the word we use for a narrow valley) and then on through a wider glen, Glen Dochart with two more lochs before reaching the village of **Crianlarich**, which is an important road & rail junction. Our road from the east is joined here by one that has come up from Glasgow, alongside lovely **Loch Lomond** on the way. At the small railway station here, trains from Glasgow divide 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. From now on, you will see signposts that 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 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 associated with 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 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 mountainside: 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 was designed by a famous Scottish engineer, Thomas Telford. We will cross over the canal 4 times on the 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 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 at 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 by Thomas Telford 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 cruise from further up the loch (no visit to the castle) 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.

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 you see was built in 1719 to house government soldiers. We will also pass the village of **Dalwhinnie**, on the right, where there is a large whisky distillery.

Further on **Blair Castle** is 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. We by-pass **Dunkeld**, an attractive little town that sits beside the river Tay, Scotland's longest river and beside it 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.

As we drive back towards Edinburgh, **Loch Leven** comes into view. It has an island with a castle on it where our most famous queen, **Mary Queen of Scots**, was imprisoned for 11 months in 1567 after many of the nobles had risen up against her. She eventually escaped but her army was defeated in battle and she sought refuge in England where her cousin, Elizabeth, was queen. However she was kept a prisoner in England for 19 years before being executed in 1587, aged 45.

To return to Edinburgh we cross over the Firth of Forth, an inlet of the North Sea and you will see our famous **Forth Bridges**. The magnificent rail bridge, opened in 1890, is a cantilever construction and was the longest (2.5 km) in the world of that type for many years. It is constructed entirely from steel girders (enough steel to build 3 Eiffel towers!) and carries 200 trains a day. The Forth Road Bridge is much younger (opened in 1964) and to the right, construction of a second road bridge has started to cope with today's volume of traffic.

Once over the Forth Road Bridge we return into Edinburgh.

* 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.



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