



WEST HIGHLAND LOCHS, MOUNTAINS & CASTLES

Our tour begins very close to the famous Edinburgh Castle and we drive down the first part of the 'Royal Mile', the main street of Edinburgh's Old Town. We soon pass a cemetery on the right hand side. There is a round guard-house here, dating back to an infamous period of grave-robbing in the early 19th century where men would dig up dead bodies. They would get well paid for this by the professor of anatomy at the university who used the bodies in large public dissection demonstrations.

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.

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, opened in 2002, that transfers boats between two canals that are 35 meters apart in height.

Just before Stirling we pass on the right the site of the Battle of Bannockburn. In 1314, the Scottish army, led by King Robert the Bruce, won a crucial victory over an English army that was three times larger. This was during the Wars of Independence when Scotland had to fight for its very existence against the English. The very imposing Stirling Castle now comes into view, up on its volcanic rock. It was always said that in the olden days, it was essential to control Stirling if you wanted to control Scotland, because of its geographical position. Beyond the castle is the impressive Wallace Monument, built in the 1860's to the memory of our other great leader in the Wars of Independence, William Wallace, who was to be immortalised some years ago in the film, Braveheart. He led the Scots to a great victory over the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297.

At Stirling we head west, crossing over the river Teith and as we do so, on the right, is the imposing Doone Castle. Built in the 14th century 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 a very popular film called 'Monty Python and the Holy Grail' in 1975. We will stop here to allow you the option of visiting the castle.*

Next we drive through Callander and into the Trossachs, a beautiful area of lochs, rivers, small mountains & forests. We are now into the narrow Pass of Leny and it is here we move from the Lowlands into the Highlands by crossing the Highland Boundary Fault Line which was formed about 450 million years ago when two landmasses collided. Our first loch, Loch Lubnaig, comes into view.



We are now into Clan MacGregor country. The Highlands have been home for hundreds of years to clans - the word comes from the Gaelic for 'children' and everyone in a particular clan has the same ancestor. The **Clan MacGregor** were often known as the 'children of the mist', so good were they at disappearing into the mountains with their stolen cattle. **Rob Roy MacGregor (1671-1734)**, the most famous member of the clan, was an accomplished cattle breeder and leader in battle but also a notorious cattle-raider. There is a village nearby called Balquidder where Rob Roy is buried in the churchyard along with his wife, Mary, and two of their sons. His reputation as a romantic hero and real-life 'Robin Hood' was greatly enhanced by novels written about him by Sir Walter Scott and others as well as by a film in 1995 starring Liam Neeson.

After passing the end of another loch, **Loch Earn**, we climb up through attractive **Glen Ogle**. We then drive through a wider glen, Glen Dochart, before reaching **Tyndrum**. In the distance is the tallest mountain in Argyll, **Ben Cruachan** (1119 m). This mountain is also known as 'The Hollow Mountain', because deep within its heart there is a massive man-built cave, large enough to house the Tower of London, that houses a hydro-electric power station, opened in 1965.

Just after leaving the village of Dalmally we change direction to drive south and the very impressive **Kilchurn Castle** comes into view, on the edge of **Loch Awe**. Kilchurn Castle is one of the most photographed castles in Scotland and was built in 1440 by the Campbell clan, one of the most powerful in the country. There is evidence to suggest that Kilchurn Castle was built by the same stone-masons who had previously built Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh, site of many legends connected to Christianity and made famous in Dan Brown's novel, 'The Da Vinci Code'. Loch Awe is the longest freshwater loch in Scotland (41 km) and very popular with fishermen.

Our next stop is the small, attractive town of **Inveraray** which stands on the shores of Loch Fyne. The 'new' town was built in the mid-18th c. at the order of 3rd Duke of Argyll when he decided his new castle needed greater privacy and so he had the original town demolished.

Inveraray is the 'capital' of the clan Campbell and **Inveraray Castle** is home to its chief, whose title is the Duke of Argyll. It was built between 1741 & 1785 & combines Baroque, Palladian & Gothic architecture. Inside there are superb displays of weapons, furniture, paintings & porcelain. You will be able to make a tour of the castle & gardens if you wish (April to October only).

From Inveraray we travel along the shores of **Loch Fyne**, Scotland's longest sea-loch (61 km). It is famous for herring & oyster fishing and is home to dolphins, seals, otters and sometimes basking sharks. We then head for a pass through mountains called the **Arrochar Alps**. At the top is **The Rest & Be Thankful** - in the days before motor vehicles it was a very welcome stopping point after the steep climb from either direction. It serves as a wonderful viewpoint for travelers' while the nearby mountains, especially Ben Arthur and Ben Narnian, are very popular with climbers & walkers



TIMBERBUSH
TOURS

Next, we will make a stop at Luss, an attractive small village on the shores of Loch Lomond. There is a pleasant short circular walk through the village, down to the loch side and then along the beach and back to the car-park, there is also a café and shop.

After leaving Loch Lomond behind we drive eastwards towards Stirling, through a few villages and then across a large, flat area called Flanders Moss. It was covered by a dense forest in Roman times nearly 2000 years ago but climate changes resulted in its decay. Once we reach Stirling we will be on the final leg of our journey, back to Edinburgh.