



JUNE 2023

HEATHERY HEIGHTS MONTHLY

Articles, walks and news



NEXT ISSUE

Beinn an Tuirc, Kintyre

GLENAN FROM HILL TO COAST

Explorations of Barr nan Damh, Eilean na Beithe and Glenan Woods...

Once a stronghold to the Lamont clan, whose forebearers arrived from Ireland to help found the Kingdom of Dàl Riada, the Cowal peninsula offers a wonderful mix of rocky coves, sandy beaches, rugged hills and glens, and areas of ancient temperate rainforest. Cowal itself is the anglicised spelling of Còmhghall (or Comgall in Irish Gaelic) and is believed to have gained its name through Comgall, the grandson and successor of Fearghas Mòr Mac Earca. Fearghas was purportedly the first King of Dàl Riada having arrived from Ireland in around 496AD.

A fine place to start exploration is on the west side of the peninsula from the car park east of the ferry terminal at Portavadie (Port a' Mhadaidh). You can get there from Tarbert on the ferry, along the Loch Lomond and Cowal Way or travel by bus, bike or car via the winding minor road that joins the B8000 from Tighnabruaich.



View from the summit of Barr nan Damh



The ruins of the old village of Glenan

The small car park lies at the head of the shore opposite the main entrance to Portavadie Marina, with paths leading into the temperate coastal woodland of Glenan, over to Glenan Bay and the deserted village, and up the small hill of Barr nan Damh.



Safety in the Outdoors

Please exercise responsibly and use appropriate clothing and equipment for your chosen outdoor activity. Inform a contact about your route/whereabouts and don't forget your phone, snacks, drink, medication and first aid supplies. Check the forecast and mountain weather conditions. Please keep your dog under close control, especially around livestock and wildlife, and be aware some open areas of moorland may have snares in use. Please follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, bylaws and laws that protect areas including National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

www.heatheryheights.co.uk

The walk

1. From the car park head north over the small burn, on your left you will see a sign about the wood. For nearly six decades the woods were owned by the Forestry Commission but, in 2019, a trust, 'Friends of Glenan Wood', were able to raise enough funds to purchase Glenan wood for the community. To your right you will see a grassy open area with a path leading across it, take this.

2. After a short distance you will see a white post and an arrow pointing left. Turn left on to the path, this will lead you over to the old village and the beginning of the small hill walk up Barr nan Damh. If you reach a house, you have gone too far!

3. The path meanders up through the oak woodland, intermingled with rowan, hazel and birch. In spring there are plenty of bluebells, but the bracken soon pushes through in summer. After 250m look very carefully to your right. The hill path crosses a small ditch - it was marked by a white post, but this was lying on the ground, easily missed, especially as the bracken gets higher! (If you don't want to go up the hill then just follow the directions from 6. below).

4. Follow the narrow path up through the bracken. The summit lies half a mile to the NE. After the initial climb you leave the trees and

reach a flatter grassy area where there is a white post on your left. Here you can either go straight on then veer left and onto the ridges heading NE or veer left, over a grassy area and then up the ridges to the NE - due to the area's geology the general line of the main ridge lies in a NE to SW direction which helps! There are occasional faint paths, but they are quite overgrown. The summit ridge has two cairns and posts, the summit cairn is the furthest of the two, being the higher bump, which can be reached over heather and blaeberrys, passing the odd boggier patch amongst a scattering of stunted trees.

The views down towards Arran and across Loch Fyne to Kintyre, Tarbert and Knapdale are fantastic for such a small hill (it is a Tump though!). Below are clear views over the Marina and to where the ghost village of Polphail stood, built for workers when Portavadie was chosen for the construction of concrete oil platforms in the 1970's. However, steel platforms then became the preferred choice and the site fell into disrepair, used by a fish farm then empty for many years. Investment did at last see the development of the marina and wide array of modern facilities that Portavadie is now synonymous with, quite a change from 1975!

5. To descend, although you may spot the posts off to the west (possibly remains of an old circuit?) it is easier to return to the main path the way you came; the other posts peter out and land you on steep rough ground.
6. On reaching the main path turn right. Continue through the woods, the path gently rises, crossing a burn and over a small col before continuing north and down to the east tributary of the Glenan Burn. You will pass a path on your left, which you will be taking on the return, before reaching a lovely little stone bridge over the burn.
7. Crossing the burn, the old village of Glenan, most likely built in the late 18th Century, is just a short walk up. The roofless buildings speak of another time when folk once lived and farmed here, most likely moved on in the mid-19th Century once sheep were brought in. The lichen and moss-covered stones and trees growing from the ruins add to the age-old atmosphere, particularly on a typical damp Scottish day. Man has lived in this area since at least prehistoric times and a prehistoric mound/cairn lies near the start of the walk and items of flint including a knife have also been found.
8. Leaving the village return down to the bridge over the burn and back down the path. On reaching the path Y junction keep right. It is quite boggy in a couple of sections despite the boardwalks. This will lead you to another split in the path above Glenan Bay, which is now signposted 'Portavadie Forest Path' and 'Portavadie Shore Path'. Both are a similar distance but, after being in the woods, it is recommended you drop down to the bay and enjoy the coastal route back. Just bear in mind the shore path has a little bit of clambering amongst rocks although it is a delightful section through the jumble of weathered broken boulders and ancient woods. Both can be boggy but lead you all the way back to the small car park!
9. If you take the shore path you can also enjoy Glenan Bay and walk out to take in the views from the small promontory of Eilean na Beithe. There are lots of wildflowers from greater stitchwort and sea pinks to wild sea radish and the woods and rocky dells are full of mosses and lichens.
10. Once back at the small car park you can visit Portavadie Marina for refreshments. They even have an infinity pool although on a hot day you may enjoy a dip in the sea.

Note: for a smaller 2km circuit you can follow the Portavadie Forest Path and Shore Path. To reach them take the lefthand path parallel to the shore after leaving the car park.

Walk Information

Route: Barr nan Damh and Glenan Old Village

Distance: 5.75km (3½ miles)

Ascent: 290m

Time: 2-3 hours (or more, if you want to paddle or swim)

Terrain: Grassy, boggy, and rocky paths and pathless sections over rough terrain

Map/s: OS Landranger 62 (1:50 000) and OS Explorer 362 (1:25 000)

Start/Finish/Parking: Car park near ferry terminal

Grid reference: NR 928 698

Public Transport: Bus 478, ferry to Tarbert

Toilets: at Portavadie ferry terminal (and the Marina/Spa/Restaurant)

[OS MAP LINK](#)



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