

EXPLORE THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF GLENSHEE

 Glenshee
Archaeology
Project

 Explorer Guide 1

Glenshee, in north-east Perth and Kinross, is a beautiful and distinctive landscape that is remarkably rich in archaeological remains - from prehistoric stone circles and burial cairns to Pictish longhouses, and the farmhouses and sheilings of the 19th century. The Glenshee Archaeology Project, developed by Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust and delivered in partnership with Northlight Heritage, investigated several rare Pictish turf and stone longhouses dating to around 500-1000 AD.

If you've ever wondered about those lumps and bumps in the ground, this guide is designed to help you better understand some of the archaeology you may encounter while walking in the area. With this leaflet you can travel through time as well as through the landscape, learning about how people have lived on the land over the millennia.

The sites highlighted in our guide are accessible from the Cateran Trail, a fully way-marked walk of 64 miles throughout parts of Glenshee and neighbouring Strathardle and Glen Isla. The trail takes its name from the cattle thieves who raided these rich lands throughout much of the later Middle Ages.

For information visit www.caterantrail.org



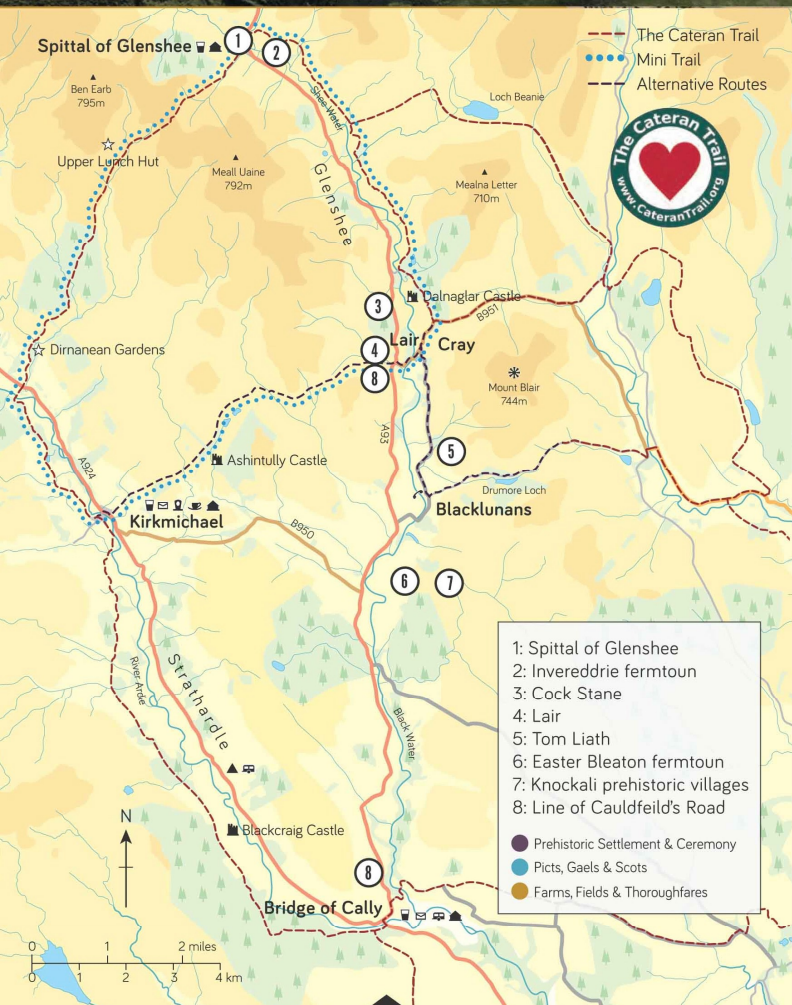
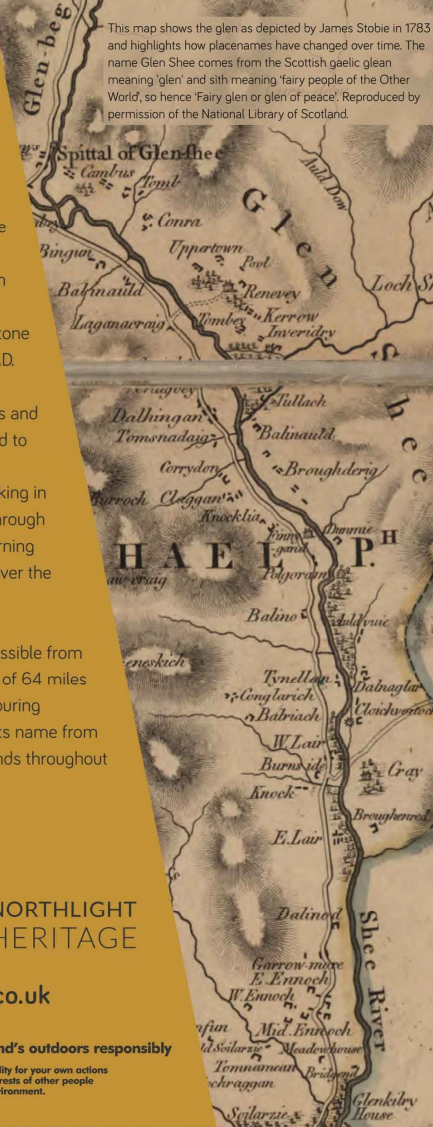
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Enjoy Scotland's outdoors responsibly

- take responsibility for your own actions
- respect the interests of other people
- care for the environment.



The map shows the Cateran Trail in Glenshee and highlights a few sites worth visiting. Many more sites and routes can be found on available OS maps. This guide will also help you to identify types of sites in the field.

EXPLORE

1 Spittal of Glenshee

The present church of 1831 (NO 108 701) replaced an 18th-century chapel, which probably stood on the site of an earlier one. Behind the graveyard is a standing stone on a glacial mound, with two small semi-circular pieces cut out of each side of the stone as if to keep a rope or chain in position. Walking upstream along the banks of the Shee Water from the church, you will find cultivation strips and a much robbed prehistoric burial cairn (NO 1053 7045). Walk along to the remains of Wester Cuthel ferm, with traces of two buildings and a kiln surrounded by rig and furrow (NO 095 711). On another glacial mound, 800 m east of the church, are the remains of a small stone circle, known as Diarmid's Grave (NO 1167 7020) (see panel on place-names). For Caulfeild's Bridge, see Site 9.

2 Invereddie fermtoun (NO 136 687)

Just behind the Compass Outdoor Centre is a complex of stone buildings and enclosures, including farm houses, byre houses, corn-drying kilns, peat-stacks, stock pens and several mill-lades associated with a horizontal mill for grinding grain. You can also see head-dykes - stone walls and earthen banks defining the boundary between regularly cultivated land (infield) and less intensively cultivated, marginal uplands (outfield).

3 Cock Stane (NO 141 643)

Clach na Coileach, the meeting place of Clan MacThomas, is marked by a massive boulder. Local lore tells that one night a cock was heard crowing from the top of the rock, immediately raising an alarm, as cockerels traditionally crow at dawn. The call to arms was raised and the men successfully fought off a raid by a rival clan.

4 Lair (NO 138 637)

To the west of the Glenshee Pottery is a remarkable collection of early medieval turf longhouses excavated by the Glenshee Archaeology Project between 2012 and 2015 (see also panel on Pictish Longhouses). Around the

longhouses you can also see a prehistoric ring cairn, prehistoric roundhouses and later buildings and cultivation remains.

5 Tom Liath (NO 150 617)

Just above the phone mast by the side of the road are the remains of two prehistoric roundhouses outlined by large, carefully selected boulders. Surrounding the buildings are several stone clearance cairns which show the people living in the houses were cultivating the ground outside.

6 Easter Bleaton fermtoun (NO 145 586)

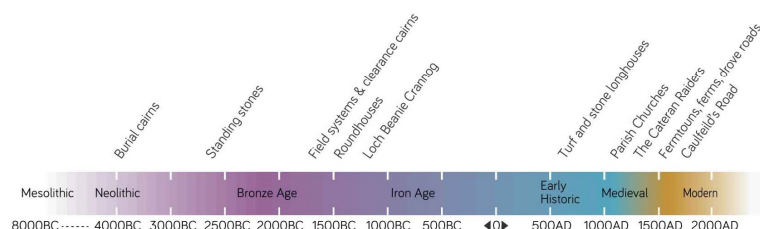
The remarkably well-preserved remains of a post-medieval fermtoun lie some 400 m east of the modern farm of Easter Bleaton. Among the numerous buildings and enclosures are four grain-drying kilns and a series of retting pools for processing wool. The layout of the village illustrates the transition from pre-improvement nucleated (tightly clustered) townships to the dispersed farmsteads of the post-improvement era (see panel on Fermtouns).

7 Knockali prehistoric villages (NO 151 586)

Above Easter Bleaton are the remains of a settlement that dates to the later 2nd or early 1st millennium BC. There are six roundhouses, with a nearby field system marked by stone clearance cairns. Some of the roundhouses are double-walled with clear entrances. Similar villages are nearby to the north-east, at NO 152 588, and across the Drumturn Burn at NO 159 578.

8 Cauldfeild's Road

The modern A93 is built over most of the road, but original sections survive as short stretches of heather-covered tracks and banks at Hill of Cally (NO 137 530) and Lair (NO 141 763). The splendid hump-backed military bridge at Spittal of Glenshee is the highlight of this 18th-century road system through the glen.



Cairns and mounds

While many cairns and mounds were formed naturally by melting glaciers around 12,000 years ago, some large, circular mounds date to the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age (c 3000-2000 BC) and were constructed to bury the dead or as a focus for ceremony and belief. Keep a look out for stones placed to define the edges of the mounds – these are known as kerbed cairns.

Much smaller mounds, often found in clusters, are field clearance cairns (stones that were cleared away to create space for cultivation) dating from the middle-late Bronze Age (c 1800-1000 BC), when a drier, warmer climate allowed farmers to grow crops higher up the hillside.



Aerial shot of the kerbed cairn (bottom of photo) at Lair (Site 5), taken during excavations of the longhouse (top of photo).

Roundhouses

Earth and stone-built roundhouses were lived in by people from the Bronze Age into the Iron Age (c 2500-500 BC). They survive today as circular banks or depressions, but these were impressive houses with conical thatched roofs and turf and timber walls above stone foundations. They are often marked as 'hut circles' on OS maps. They appear to have been abandoned in this area from around 800 BC as the climate became wetter and colder.



A well-preserved roundhouse, note the large stones defining the walls.

PICTS, GAELS & SCOTS



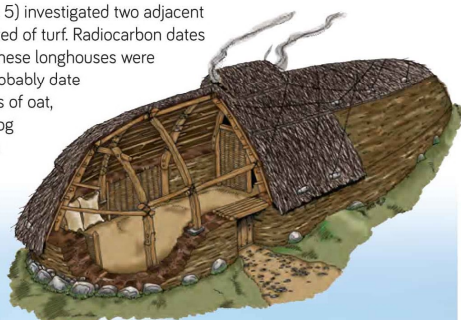
Reconstruction of excavated longhouses and cairn at Lair (Site 5)

Pitcarmick houses

Until recently, very little was known about medieval settlement in these upland areas. However, archaeologists surveying during the 1980s identified the remains of some unusual longhouses with distinctive rounded ends. Glasgow University excavated some of these buildings at Pitcarmick, in nearby Strathardle, and radiocarbon dates showed they were in use from around 600-1000 AD.

Our excavations at Lair in Glenshee (Site 5) investigated two adjacent longhouses, which were mainly constructed of turf. Radiocarbon dates show they were in use c 600-900 AD. These longhouses were surrounded by similar buildings which probably date from around the same time. Pollen grains of oat, barley and rye sampled from a nearby bog show the inhabitants were growing these crops in the area.

They can be tricky to spot, but look out for low earthen banks, sometimes containing stones, and forming a rectangular shape in plan. They can measure anywhere from 5 m to 30 m in length. These Pictish buildings were similar in layout to Viking longhouses, and also to the much later blackhouses of the Western Isles.



Cutaway reconstruction of excavated longhouse at Lair, (Site 5).



Example of an unexcavated longhouse photographed in the winter. Low winter light and snowy conditions often help pick out archaeological sites that might otherwise be missed.

Fermtouns and shielings

The glen is littered with the remains of fermtouns (farm-towns) and townships dating from the 17th to mid-19th centuries. Farming during this period was very much a collective endeavour. Alongside individual dwellings and byres, there were many shared buildings such as grain-drying kilns (essential in a damp climate), barns and mills. Following a lade – the linear, stone-lined channel directing water to the mill wheel – can help you identify the mill building to which it leads. The aerial photograph on the front cover is of Easter Bleaton fermtoun (Site 7) – a great example of township of this era.

Higher in the uplands are the remains of shielings – small bothies used mainly by women and children, who were responsible for tending the native black cattle, and later sheep, on the summer pastures. While the livestock grazed, the women made butter and cheese and spun wool for the winter months. This way of life came to an end in the early 1800s with sweeping changes in land management and the clearance of people from townships, an era known as the Improvements.

Field boundaries and cultivation remains

Around the fermtouns you will see the scars of cultivation remains, known as rig and furrow, the pattern of ridges and troughs created by ploughing with a horse. Rig-and-furrow cultivation was widespread in Scotland and practiced over centuries. You can often see one phase of rig and furrow overlying another.

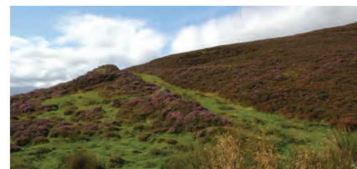


Aerial photo of field systems and cultivation remains at Glenkilrie.

Drove routes and Caulfeild's military road

The network of drove roads throughout the area reflects the importance of cattle to the economy. Following the Union of England and Scotland Act of 1603, droving increased into the large-scale movement of cattle and sheep from the hills to the markets of lowland Scotland and south of the border.

In the first half of the 18th century, the British government began a major programme of road building in the Highlands in order to provide good transportation links between a series of newly constructed forts and barracks. These were established as a control mechanism in reaction to the first Jacobite rebellion in 1715. Major William Caulfeild took over from General Wade in 1732 and brought the first metalled road through Glenshee in 1749. It connected the barracks at Coupar Angus with Braemar, thus linking Perth to the new Fort George near Inverness.



Caulfeild's Road at Lair, (Site 9).

In his role as Inspector of Roads, General Caulfeild was responsible for over 900 miles of road and over 600 bridges. The modern A93 is built over the route for most of the glen, though you can see glimpses of the original road at Site 9.

PLACE-NAMES & THE FINAGALIAN HEROES

Place-names offer a window into the past – often telling us how people lived and interacted with the landscape. They can provide insight into the languages spoken in the area, how places were used and how land was owned, as well as local stories and folklore.

Given the wealth of Pictish settlements in Glenshee, it's surprising that only one place-name – Persie (meaning parcel of land or garden) – appears to have a Pictish origin. Most of the other place-names in the glen are Scottish Gaelic (SG) or Scots in origin. Glenshee comes from the SG gleann (glen) and sith (fairy), hence the 'Fairy Glen'. Spittal comes from SG spideal – 'refuge' or 'hospice', which can mean either a hospital or an inn on a long route. In Glenshee this may relate to droving cattle, although the Spittal may have begun life as a rest for pilgrims. Strathardle, recorded in 1468 as Strathardil, may come from the SG srath (a wide river valley) and àrd (high), thus 'high-river', though it is enigmatically recorded in about 1279 as aqua de Ferdalf.

The Gaelic place-names of Glenshee also contain many references the Irish legend of Fionn mac Cumhail and his band of warriors, transferring many of their escapades to this landscape. One ballad, Laoith Dhiarmaid (The Lay of Diarmaid), tells how Diarmaid, one of Fionn's men, is killed by a boar on Ben Gulabin at the head of Glenshee. Here we find a prehistoric stone circle known as the Grave of Diarmaid (Site 1).

*An gleann so fá Bheann Ghulbainn ghuirm
as h-aílde tulcha fa ghréin,
niorbh annamh a shrotha gu dearg
an déidh shealg o Fhionn na bhFéin.*

*This glen below green Beann Ghulbainn,
whose knolls are the fairest under the sun,
not frequently were its streams red after
hunts had been held by Fionn of the Fiana.*



Grave of Diarmaid (Site 1), image© PKCT