

NORTH OF SCOTLAND LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER



www.ldwa.org.uk/NorthWestGrampian

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND EMAIL ADDRESSES: Andrew Thacker, Chairman (chair.northofscotland@ldwa.org.uk); Graham Smith, Secretary and Newsletter Editor (n.scot.ldwa@gmail.com); John Henderson, Walks Secretary (johnhenderson628@btinternet.com); Treasurer Lorna Sproates (lornasproates@hotmail.com); Julie Cribb, Speyside 100 organiser (julie.cribb99@gmail.com); Bea Jefferson (bea_jefferson@hotmail.com); Jan Adamson (jan_adamson@hotmail.co.uk); Pete Mitchell (petem.nwglldwa@btinternet.com); Margo Forbes (margoforbes@btinternet.com).

SPRING SOCIAL WALKS

OUR group website is regularly updated, so always check this for further details of the walks listed below, any last minute changes to walks and information about new walks listed after the newsletter has been emailed, such as pop-up walks. Dogs are allowed on some walks at the discretion of the walk leader, so please always contact the walk leader in advance if you wish to bring a dog on the walk.

Speyside Way Tomintoul Spur (pop-up walk) - March 16.

Linear walk of 15 miles doing the Tomintoul Spur, which is generally reckoned to be the best part of the Speyside Way, one of Scotland's Great Trails.

As the walk is linear, arrangements for cars must be made. So we meet at Tomintoul at 10am, leave a car there and drive to the start of the walk at Cragganmore, aiming to start walking at about 10.30am. At the end of the walk, we drive back to the start and the other car.

Anyone wishing to do this walk is asked to contact leader Graham Smith – either emailing him on n.scot.ldwa@gmail.com or ring his mobile – 07815 453324.

Bow, Bin and Castles – Saturday March 25

19 miles, start 9am, meet at Portknockie at the Bow Fiddle rock viewpoint. There are 13 or

19 mile options. The first loop of this figure of eight walk will take us on good tracks via Cullen Castle and through woodlands to the summit of the Bin of Cullen (320m). We head back down to the shore at Cullen, where there's the option of either returning to Portknockie along the beach or heading further east along the coast to the ruins of Findlater Castle before returning to Portknockie. The coastal path to the Castle is narrow and rocky in places. To book, contact leader Bea Jefferson (bea_jefferson@hotmail.com).

Scaraben (a three summit Graham hill) – Sunday April 30

9 miles, start 11am. Take the A9 north to Dunbeath and then the single-track road westwards to the parking area at the phone box at Braemore. This hill walk takes in the long undulating ridge of Scaraben (626m) in a remote corner of Caithness. There are wonderful views from the summit and Orkney is visible on a clear day. The terrain can be steep in places but fairly straightforward. To book, contact walker leader Graham Smith (n.scot.ldwa@gmail.com).

To the Lighthouse – Sunday May 14

17.5 miles, start 10am. Meet in the car park at Inver, east of Tain (postcode IV20 1SE). This walk goes via Portmahomack to the lighthouse at Tarbat Ness and returns via Rockfield on the coastal path. To book, contact leader Graham Smith (n.scot.ldwa@gmail.com).

Inverness Explorer – Saturday May 27

14 miles, start 9.30am. Meet outside Inverness Railway Station, Academy Street entrance. Nearest car park at Rose Street. Circular route of mixed terrain, tracks, canal tow path, forestry tracks and minor roads. To book, contact leader Jan Adamson (jadamson516@gmail.com).

Grantown North Circular – Sunday June 18

15 miles, start 9am. Meet at the Burnfield/Museum car park behind the Grant Arms Hotel in Grantown-on-Spey. The route heads NW to Dreggie and then towards Lochindorb on good shooters' paths before crossing the A939 near to the famous Jesus Saves stone. The return is via the Dava Way. To book, contact leader Mary Atkinson (sandal.farm@btinternet.com).

**PLEASE GO TO OUR WEBSITE TO CHECK DETAILS OF ALL GROUP WALKS –
www.ldwa.org.uk/NorthWestGrampian**

MIDWEEK WALKS PLANNED

AFTER suggestions from committee members Margo Forbes and Pete Mitchell, the group is looking to put on occasional midweek walks.

These walks would probably be put on at late notice so would therefore be pop-up walks, appearing on the website and on Facebook but not in Strider.

We are looking at starting these midweek walks with the 15 mile Tomintoul Spur on the Speyside Way on Thursday March 16. This is a linear walk between Ballindalloch and Tomintoul, so car sharing needs to be organised. It is being organised by Graham Smith so if you are interested in going, please contact him (his email address is above).

Details of any further midweek walks will appear on our website.

LDWA AWARD FOR OUR JOHN



JOHN Henderson – pictured left - who has been the NoS LDWA Social Walks Secretary for seven years, has been given an Eager Beaver award in the annual LDWA Volunteer Awards. John was nominated by chairman Andrew Thacker and secretary Graham Smith. Their nomination read ...

John Henderson, who has been Social Walks Secretary since 2016, is rightly described as the ‘engine room’ of North of Scotland LDWA.

It is to John’s immense credit that the group has such a wide variety of walks which does justice to our huge and magnificent area. John organises the walks programme and ensures they are publicised on our website and Facebook page and in Strider, and puts photos on FB afterwards. For one of the smallest groups in the LDWA, we have one of the highest numbers of walk leaders.

John has also been one of the main organisers of our Laich O’Moray 50, planning the route, organising checkpoints, and working through the night to ensure the event is the success it always is.

With typical relish and enthusiasm, John has taken on the key task of Route Coordinator for next year’s Speyside 100. He has planned the route and is now in the process of booking checkpoints and writing the route description. A back problem means John currently has difficulty walking long distances but he still turns up on our walks (giving lifts to group members living near him in Forres) with his bicycle to cycle the route.

The award is due to be announced at the LDWA’s national AGM, being held in Chester on March 12.

We are sure that all group members will agree that John’s award is very well deserved. Being Social Walks Secretary is the most thankless job in any walking group and he has done it very well for so long.

Congratulations, John.

OCTOBER DATE FOR LoM 50

OUR group's 51 mile challenge event will take place over the weekend of October 7-8. Once again, it will be based at Forres and will start from the cricket pavilion in Grant Park.

The route will be the same as it has been for the past two years – going clockwise out of Forres to Findhorn, followed by that delightful stretch of coast to Lossiemouth, before turning inland to Elgin and back to the start via the upland forested area of Heldon Hill and a section of the Dava Way, with six checkpoints. Entrants will again have 24 hours to complete the walk.

We have decided to put on a marshals' walk if there is sufficient interest in having one, and this will be held over the weekend of September 9-10.

Entry details for the event will be in the next Strider and anyone interested in taking part in the marshals' walk is asked to contact Graham Smith (email address is above).

SPEYSIDE 100 IN A YEAR'S TIME



PLANS are progressing for our Speyside 100 – next year's flagship event for the LDWA – which takes place May 25-27, with the marshals' walk scheduled for the weekend of May 4-6.

The event will be based at the Badaguish Outdoor Centre, five miles from Aviemore, and John Henderson has very nearly finished planning the route, with much help from Roger Boston, and is in the process of booking checkpoints.

The route will visit many of the towns and villages in the Spey Valley including Kincaig, Aviemore, Boat of Garten, Nethy Bridge, Grantown-on-Spey and Cromdale,

and then across to Glenlivet and Tomintoul. Much of the route has been on some of our social walks.

John and Julie Cribb – who is the event organiser as well as being the LDWA's national chairwoman – have had a very productive meeting with the Cairngorms National Park Authority, and as this newsletter was being produced, a meeting with the regional branch of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds was being arranged.

The event organising group is meeting every month, the website should be up and running soon, and treasurer Rikky Beck has been busy juggling the various costs involved. We should be able to announce the entry fees – for the main event and the marshals' walk - by the end of September, with entries due to open in October.

The maximum number of walkers on an LDWA Hundred is 500 and we are anticipating there will be a good turnout on the Speyside 100. We reckon LDWA members from throughout the UK will want to come up here and walk in our marvellous Highlands landscape, as many of them may well want to make it a whole week or two week holiday. Also, there is only likely to be three or four hours of darkness during the night sections of the event and on the marshals' walk, and we believe that will have a lot of appeal, particularly to LDWA members who have walked Hundreds before.

But ... in order to give our visitors next a real Highland welcome, we are going to need lots and lots of helpers. The Speyside 100 is a massive event – by far the biggest and most important our group has ever been involved with - and we are one of the smallest groups in the LDWA. So any offers of help to take on any job – no matter how large or small – will be gratefully received. So please contact Julie – her email address is above.



RIKKY AND DAVE REWARDED



TOP: Walk leader John Henderson makes the presentation to Rikky Beck at the start of the group walk from Fochabers on January 29. **LEFT:** Andrew Thacker makes the presentation to Dave Galloway at the group's Christmas lunch, held at the Salt Cellar restaurant in Lossiemouth. Rikky's presentation would have been made then as well, but she was unable to make the walk and the meal because of bad weather, so it was postponed.

RIKKY BECK and Dave Galloway have been recognised for their long service to the group committee.

Rikky and Dave both stood down from the committee at the AGM in September, after both putting in many years excellent service. Rikky served as treasurer and Dave organised many highly enjoyable coach trips which have taken members to some wonderful walking areas spread throughout the north of Scotland. At our Christmas meal on December 11, held at the Salt Cellar restaurant in Lossiemouth following our pre-meal 11 mile walk, group chairman Andrew Thacker presented Dave with a bottle of whisky liqueur, and at the start of the our 14 mile walk from Fochabers on January 29, walk leader and Social Walks Coordinator John Henderson presented Rikky with two pairs of walking socks.

Rikky has been replaced as treasurer by Lorna Sproates and Dave's place on the committee has been filled by Margo Forbes (email addresses for Lorna and Margo are above).

STEP THIS WAY FOR FESTIVALS

THE first Inverness Festival of Walking and Wheeling takes place between May 20-28, and our group is putting on an LDWA taster walk.

Jan Adamson is leading the 14 mile walk Inverness Explorer walk from Inverness Railway Station on Saturday May 27, starting at 9.30am. Details of the walk are listed above and are on our group website.

As part of the festival, there will also be a drop-in session, where members of the various walking groups involved will have representatives there to speak to visitors. This will be held on Saturday May 20 at Wasps Creative Academy in Stephen's Street, Inverness, between 11am-2pm. Our group will be represented, and we hope to use the occasion to recruit one or two new members.

Details of the Inverness Festival of Walking and Wheeling Festival are on the event website www.wawfest.com

Meanwhile, the annual Moray Outdoor and Walking Festival takes place between June 16-26 and we have a walk taking in part of the Dava Way, being led by Mary Atkinson, which is being included in the event – the 15 mile Grantown North Circular on Sunday June 18 (details are on the walks listing above and on the group website).

A Moray Outdoor and Walking Festival event which may interest a few of our members is the Dava Way Ghost Train Walk on June 24-25. This involves walking the entire 24 mile Dava Way at night, with walkers meeting at Forres and then being taken by bus to Grantown-on-Spey to start the walk. The bus departs from Grantown Square at 10pm and walkers should arrive in Forres between 4am-7am. Entering the event costs £30 and this includes coach travel, a stop at Dava station for refreshments, a breakfast stop at Dunphail station and refreshments at the terminus – Dallas Dhu distillery in Forres – plus first aid cover and transport to Forres if anyone has to retire. Booking is essential, and as this newsletter was being produced the event was already 50 per cent full, so to enter, go to the Dava Way website at www.davaway.org.uk

WEEKEND WITH OUR NEIGHBOURS

THE joint weekend with our neighbouring LDWA group, Heart of Scotland, has been planned for the weekend of August 19-20, and it will be based at Ballater.

This follows a successful joint weekend last year, based at Blair Atholl, when three members of NoS group and seven from HoS had a most enjoyable two days of walking and socialising. Dave Galloway has kindly offered to lead walks on both days. They will be hill walks but if the weather turns bad (as it may!) then Dave will organise lower level walks instead. The idea, as with last year, is that people going will be required to book their own accommodation and there is a wide variety at Ballater and nearby Braemar, including a hostel. We plan to meet for a drink on the Friday evening and have the first walk on the Saturday before having a meal together in the evening. There will be another walk on the Sunday before we all go our separate ways.

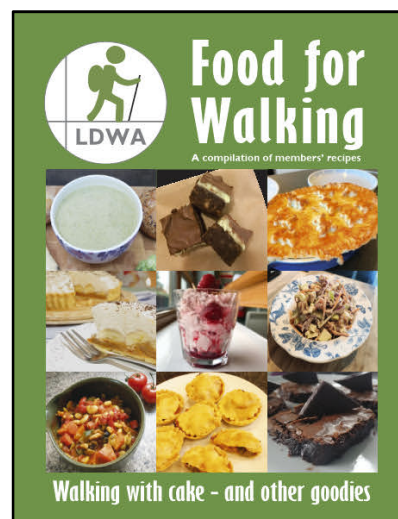
More details about the weekend will appear on our website and in the newsletter. Anyone expressing an interest in the weekend is asked to contact secretary Graham Smith (contact details above).

GET YOUR LDWA RECIPE BOOK

FOOD For Walking, the LDWA's recipe book marking the association's 50th birthday – right - is available.

Produced by our former group chairwoman and now national LDWA chairwoman Julie Cribb, national membership officer Julia Warman and Neil Smy, who has looked after Strider printing and distribution 20-plus years, it is 78 pages and contains 56 recipes for starters, mains and puddings. The recipes, from the length and breadth of the country, have all been provided by LDWA members. Featured recipes include such delights as Minestrone Special Soup, Secret Santa's Vegan Chilli, Cheesy Feet (yes, really!), as well as The Honourable Bread Pudding, and Cauliflower Cheese Soup, Roast Vegetable, Sausage and Baked Gnocchi and Red Lentil Dhal, the last three supplied by our group's very own Jan Adamson,

The recipe book also has contributions from association President Phoebe Smith and Hazel Bound (Cornwall & Devon Group), who has checkpointed on LDWA events for decades. The book, which would make an ideal birthday present, costs £7.50 plus £2.50 P&P and is available via the LDWA shop - https://ldwa.org.uk/shop/list_items.php?category_id=5.



TRAVERSE OF THE LAIRIG GHURU

THE Moray Mountaineering Club is planning a traverse of Lairig Ghru in September as the club's Bus Meet programme is restarted.

Bus Meets are due to run from April to September and, as we all belong to the LDWA, members of our group can attend these meets. Group members will be asked to pay £15 per trip. John Henderson will be adding these meets to our website, as details become available, with the first on a Sunday in mid April – check our group website for details. Pick-up times are 7am Elgin, 7.20am Forres, 7.40am Nairn and 8am Inverness.

The Lairig Ghru walk is on Sunday September 17. The bus will probably not pick up in Inverness as there will not be enough time, so you would have to come to Forres for 7.20am. The bus then travels south to Grantown and then via Tomintoul to Braemar. The bus will travel six miles further to the Linn of Dee car park, where the walk starts, and should get there at about 9.30am. The walk is around 21-22 miles and those going will probably pick up the bus in Aviemore, for the return journey. The walk should take 7-8 hours.

WHATTSAPP CAR SHARING GROUP

ALTHOUGH the price of fuel has gone down in recent months, it is still very expensive and NoS Group covers a huge area where we often have to drive a long distance to go on one of our walks. So to help group members, Alison Collins has set up a car sharing group on WhatsApp. Any group members wishing to give lifts to other members for walks, or to have lifts themselves, is invited to join. Just email your name, membership number and mobile phone number to Group Secretary Graham Smith on n.scot.ldwa@gmail.com

COASTAL WALKING PROJECT

NORTH of Scotland LDWA members are being asked to help in a huge project which would see teams of walkers hike the entire coastlines of Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland in May 2025, a total of more than 10,000 miles.

The project is called Beach of Dreams and behind it is Martyn Howe, a trail walker and outdoors writer who has regularly featured in Strider. Martyn has divided the coastlines into 47 sections of roughly 250 miles each. There are 14 sections in Scotland.

At this stage Martyn is looking for people to identify sub-sections of those sections which can be walked comfortably within a day – 12-15 miles. He does not – yet – need those sub-sections to be walked out. Once those sub-sections have been identified, plans for the project can progress. Martyn is also appealing nationally to LDWA members for help.

Many members in our group are familiar with the north of Scotland coast. Forres-Lossiemoth features on our Laich O'Moray 50, and the 147 mile John o'Groats Trail runs from Inverness (the Tain-Golspie section has featured on our social walks programme).

If any members can help, they are asked to email Martyn on martyn@kinetika.co.uk

A full story about Beach of Dreams will be in the April Strider.

IN THE PICTURE AT LOSSIEMOUTH



These two photographs were taken by John Henderson during our pre-Christmas meal walk at Lossiemouth on December 11.

The photo above was taken at the start of the walk by the £1.8 million pedestrians' bridge at Lossie, which was opened in May last year. As the photo shows, conditions were almost freezing when we set off – but the walk soon warmed us up.

And the photo left shows, from the left, Roger Boston, Graham Smith, Lesley McBride and Dave Galloway during the walk – by when we were all warmed up!

ALONG THE JOHN O'GROATS TRAIL

By Graham Smith



The Duncansby Sea Stacks near the end of the John o'Groats Trail.

I COMPLETED the entire John o'Groats Trail – 147 miles from Inverness to (you've guessed it!) John O'Groats - as a winter walking project.

As I have written in previous newsletters and for Strider, the driving force behind the JoGT is Jay Wilson, who lives in Inverness and hails from Virginia in the US. In 2016 Jay set up the Friends of the John o'Groats Trail, which is a registered charity enabling the JoGT to apply for various sources of funding.

I belong to the Friends and I'm also a Trail Warden. My patch is Alness-Golspie which I'm required to walk at least twice a year to see if there are any problems which need addressing, such as overgrown vegetation to be cleared.

Over the winter I decided to walk the JoGT in stretches. I was able to use trains getting from and to my home in Tain for the starts and ends

of the walks on the first four stages – Inverness-Alness (24.25 miles), Alness-Tain (13 miles), Tain-Golspie (22.5 miles) and Golspie-Helmsdale (19 miles).

Those stretches totalled 79 miles, but the trains head away from the line of the Trail after Helmsdale, so I had to decide how to organise transport for the next 68 miles. Originally I thought of using buses but I found bus services are, let us say, not as frequent as many people would like right up in the north of Scotland.

So I decided instead to cut down on the planned mileage, drive to the start of each section of the Trail, do the walk – and then walk back to the car along the A9 or the A99. I initially found this idea quite daunting, as it is advisable to avoid road walking if at all possible.

But I actually found the road walking not too bad because neither the A9 nor the A99 were too busy when I was walking them, I had decent weather and the scenery was still very pleasant. I found I was able to move into LDWA challenge walk pace and crack on, covering the nine miles from Wick to Whaligoe in two hours after one stretch.

So, more or less, that's how I tackled the sections of Helmsdale-Berriedale (9 miles), Berriedale-Dunbeath (7.25 miles), Dunbeath-Lybster (9 miles), Lybster-Whaligoe (8 miles), Whaligoe-Wick (10.75 miles), Wick-Keiss (10.5 miles) and Keiss-John O'Groats (13.5 miles).

I say 'more or less' because when I walked from Berriedale to Dunbeath, I was starting to walk back to the car along the A9 when I happened to meet Jay Wilson, who was putting up some waymarker signs, and he gave me a lift back to my car. And when I walked from



ABOVE: The coast just beyond Brora. BELOW: A sea stack near Dunbeath.



Dunbeath to Lybster, I was able to get a lift back to my car from a very kind man I met in the village.

The John o'Groats Trail is a very fine long distance walk. It takes walkers to some absolutely magnificent coastal scenery, including some really spectacular sea stacks. The further north you go, the better the scenery gets.

The final stretch, from Keiss to John o'Groats, is the finest stretch of coastal walking I have ever done. As the path made a slight ascent nearing Duncansby Head, wonderful views opened out across Pentland Firth to the Orkneys – absolutely memorable and for me the best part of the entire Trail (which more than made up for the road bashing back to the car which was to follow).

But, as Jay and everyone involved with the Friends of the John o'Groats Trail readily admit, the JoGT is a work in progress. The terrain can often be

challenging and there are walker safety issues with some stretches, particularly in the



Sinclair's Bay.

northern bits. This all clearly highlighted on the Trail's website <https://www.jogt.org.uk/> For example, there are many clifftop sections where the path is narrow and there will be a barbed wire fence on one side and a sheer drop of hundreds of feet on the other, so immense care is needed. There are also some burns which are difficult to negotiate and which may require fording. The most serious of these is Loth Burn, a few miles from Brora, which is impassable at high tide. Here I had to divert a good 100 yards upstream to wade across, and even then, the water almost reached my waist. I am glad to report that there are plans to put a proper bridge here. And I am very glad to inform NoS group members that these walker safety issues are in the process of being addressed. Apart from putting a bridge across Loth Burn, there are also plans to put a bridge across the River of Wester, shortly before Keiss, and which is also impassable at high

tide (I avoided any problems here by diverting from the Trail and walked the best part of two miles along the A99 to cross the river at a bridge and then took a track to the beach at Sinclair's Bay).



Freswick Bay.

Also, plank bridges are going to be put across some of the smaller burns where there are none at the moment, and on some of the more exposed clifftop sections, there will be negotiations with landowners to see if the line of the JoGT can be moved a little way inland.

All this will be happening under the supervision of the JoGT's first Trail Manager, Kenneth McElroy, who was appointed last year to oversee its development. But all this work can be expensive – for example, the services of a structural engineer are being deployed to deal with the



The view across Pentland Firth approaching John o'Groats.

problem at Loth Burn - and they can take time.

Until these issues have been addressed, the hazards just have to be negotiated by people walking the

Trail. To be honest, I would not be happy leading a group of walkers on some of the stretches, and I certainly wouldn't take a dog on those exposed clifftop sections (I'm glad to say there are no hazards like that on the Alness-Golspie section, which is my patch – I put Tain-Golspie on our group walks programme last year).

So to any North of Scotland LDWA members considering tackling the John o'Groats Trail, either in its entirety or in stages, I would urge you to check tide tables and to look closely at the map to see how the Loth Burn and River of Wester crossings can be avoided. I wouldn't advise you to wade across Loth Burn, as I did. Be very careful on the clifftop sections from Helmsdale to the end – and don't take a dog on them.

You are going to find the JoGT challenging, but the walking can be wonderful and you will visit some of the most remote and beautiful parts of Scotland's coast.

For navigation on my winter walking project, I used the route descriptions from the excellent website <https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/> and the waterproof trail map produced by Harveys. A guide to the Trail, produced by Cicerone and written by Jay Wilson and Andy Robertson (who has written a book on walking from Land's End to John o'Groats, *Walking The End To End Trail*) is due to be published shortly.



LEFT: A sea stack near Lybster.

RIGHT: Graham by the famous distance sign at John o'Groats.



MEMORIES OF THE SPEYSIDE WAY

By Graham Smith



ABOVE: The River Spey near Kingussie.

BELOW: The former Ruthven Barracks, near the start of the Speyside Way.



walking in the very welcome spring sunshine.

We left the Balavoulin at about 9.30 to follow more nice, easy and very well maintained paths to Boat of Garten. We had a stop there and looked around the excellent railway station,

IN April last year I walked the Speyside Way, a 72 mile Scotland Great Trail, with Peter Aylmer from Essex & Herts LDWA.

The Speyside Way goes from Newtonmore to Buckie, and sections of the route are on our Speyside 100 next year. Peter and I completed the walk in a memorable five days ...

April 21 – Newtonmore-Aviemore (20 miles).

I got the 0659 train from Tain and arrived at Newtonmore at 0940. I walked along the cycle lane to Kingussie, where I met Peter (who didn't fancy walking along the cycle path). It was fine walking all the way – good, well maintained tracks, delightful scenery and sunny weather. We had our lunch stop at Insh, then we had a very nice stop and a drink in the old Post Office at Kincraig, which has been converted into a cafe, before the last seven miles to Aviemore, where we stayed at the Balavoulin pub/hotel.

It certainly wasn't a demanding walk, but low level walking in

Scotland can't come much better than that.

April 22 – Aviemore-Grantown-on-Spey (17 miles).

This was another very good day – again, we enjoyed some fine low level



The Spey at Boat of Garten.

before taking a delightful track through the Abernethy Forest to Nethy Bridge, where we had a good lunch stop in a cafe. We then followed the old railway track to Grantown-on-Spey, arriving at the Garth Hotel at about 4.30. We made the most of that hotel – because we were wild camping the next two nights.

April 23 – Grantown-on-Spey-Cragganmore (15 miles).

Although we did not have a great mileage, this was quite a demanding day. As we didn't have a high mileage, we didn't start walking until just gone 10. At first the walking was very similar to that of the first two days – straightforward on good, well waymarked paths, and mainly through woods.

At Cromdale we passed the station, run by volunteers, and it was very impressive. Shortly after that we had the first proper climb of the walk, taking a very pleasant path running just below the Tom an Uird area.

Unfortunately, after that we encountered some difficulties on the

route caused by an uncooperative landowner who we felt was being bloody-minded in places. For long stretches we were having to take a narrow path between barbed wire fences, when there were perfectly good tracks alongside. There was also poor signage, compounded by waymark posts which had either been knocked over or were non-existent. And we had to go through squeeze stile after squeeze stile after squeeze stile, which was most frustrating and very annoying.

Eventually we left all those difficulties behind and climbed a delightful path which rounded the Woods of Knocfrink. Then we had the steepest climb of the Trail (up to then) by the Garvault Plantation. But we were on good paths.

With 4.5 miles to go, we dropped down to the A95, which we followed for a short while before taking paths down to the river. We followed the river to the free camp site at Cragganmore, arriving at 4.30. We had dehydrated meals with us and the toilet was closed - but there was a tap!

April 24 – Cragganmore-Boat o'Brig (20 miles).

The night was very cold and testing, with the temperature down to two degrees, and I had great difficulty keeping warm and getting to sleep. Various thoughts went through my head – like making an early start today and walking 25 miles to Fochabers and finding a proper bed there. But I managed to get **some** sleep, and I got up just after 7. It was cloudy, with some fine rain, which persisted just about all day.

We started walking just before 8, and the first 12 miles were quite tedious – mile after mile after mile along the line of the old Strathspey Railway. At Charlestown of Aberlour we had our lunch stop, spending more than an hour in a very nice cafe (which, after the night I had



Peter crossing the old railway bridge at Craggonmore.

had, I certainly needed). Then we had two more tedious miles along the old railway track to Craigellachie, after which it was a relief to pick up a road, even if it went on for four miles. The Speyside Way then left the road on a nice, gentle climbing path which at a couple of intervals gave very good views across to the River Spey. We had a good, albeit at times slightly boggy, descent to Boat o' Brig, where we had decided to pitch our tents. Peter found a good spot quite close to the path. I had asked a very nice local if we could camp near her house – we could, but the ground was a bit lumpy. So we decided to pitch at the spot Pete found, not far from the river. I was a bit apprehensive after my experience the previous night, but the weather forecast said it would be a few degrees warmer. So I

decided to put on more clothes – and hope for the best.

April 25 – Boat o' Brig-Buckie (17 miles).

I certainly slept better than I did the previous night, but I still didn't sleep well. I got up just after 7.30, and we were moving by 8.30. The first few miles were on a road to Fochabers, which provided us with some good views, although the tarmac was a bit tedious at times. At Fochabers we had a stop and then took paths through the woods to Spey Bay, where we had a good hour-long stop for lunch at the visitor centre.

We then set out on the last six miles to Buckie and they were quite nice, although initially the path was blocked in several places by huge fallen trees. The weather was by then turning, and we were getting some light rain which was not very pleasant. We had a quick stop at Portgordon and then carried on to Buckie, getting to the official end/start of the Trail in Cluny Square at about 3.45.

I'm afraid I can't honestly say the Speyside Way is one of my favourite National Trails – much too much walking on former railway tracks, a bit too much walking on roads, and not enough walking in the open countryside where you can enjoy sweeping views. But it certainly has some fine walking, particularly between Kingussie and Grantown-on-Spey – and that high level stretch on day 3 was for me the best part of the walk.

And for navigation, I used the Cicerone *Walking The Speyside Way* guide, written by LDWA



The lovely view from near Loch Insh, between Kingussie and Aviemore.

member Alan Castle, who lives just outside Moffat.

I have now done all four of Scotland's Great Trails, and in order of my preference, they are ...

- 1) The Southern Upland Way (completed in 2003 and 2013).
- 2) The West Highland Way (1987) – which I may be doing again this year.
- 3) The Great Glen Way (2021).
- 4) The Speyside Way (2022).

Have any other North of Scotland LDWA members completed all four of these Great Trails?

Please feel free to send your memories – with your list of preferences if you wish – to the newsletter editor so you can share them with group members And do any of you have other stories of walks – long and short – you would like to share? Please send them, with photos, as other group members would love to read about them.

***The best section of the Speyside Way is the Tomintoul Spur which Peter and I did not do last year owing to time constraints. But it is on our social walks programme for March 16 as a pop-up walk – see GROUP SOCIAL WALKS above.**



LEFT: Peter and tents by the wild camp site at Boat o' Brig. RIGHT: Graham at Buckie, the official end/start of the Speyside Way.

SOCIAL WALKS SNAPSHOTS

ENJOYING THE GREWAT

OUTDORES: These photographs were taken on The Great Outdores, a 16 mile walk from Dores on November 27, led by Jan Adamson.

Fourteen members came on the walk and the group were treated to some wonderful views around Loch Ness.

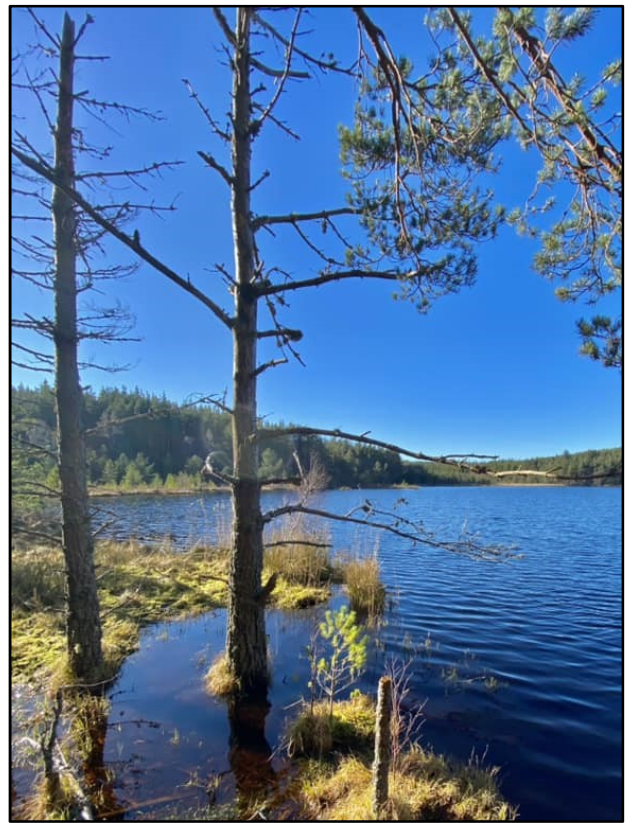
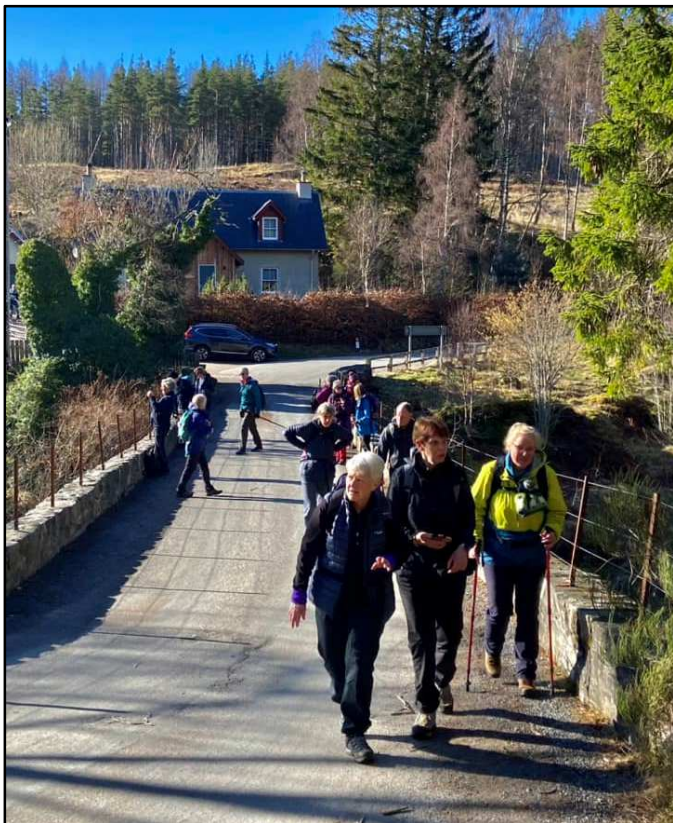




FETCHING UP IN FESHIE: The photos on this page and on page 19 were taken on the 10 mile Inshriach Forest Walk, from Feshiebridge, on February 26.

There were 16 of us – plus two dogs – and the walk was led by John Henderson. Much of the route will be used on next year's Speyside 100. We were treated to some glorious February sunshine.







WIND-UP: These photos were taken on The Long and Winding Trail, a 14 mile walk from Fochabers on January 29, led by John Henderson. There were 17 of us (plus two dogs). The walk took in part of our Speyside 100 route.



