



No5 AUTUMN 2023

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AUTUMN GROUP 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. **Dogs** – group policy is now that dogs can go on walks at the discretion of the walk leader. Members who wish to go on group walks with their dogs are asked to check with the walk leader in advance.

Sunday September 14 – AGM and Walk

12 miles: starts at 9am from Edinkillie Hall, Dunphail. The walk will follow a circular route along the Dava Way to Altyre Estate and then back via paths and tracks to Logie Steading for coffee and cakes. The last section will be along the river to Dunphail Castle, then back to the village hall for the AGM.

Contact walk leader Pete Mitchell to book – either via email on petem.nwglldwa@btinternet.com or via text on 0788146221.

Sunday October 15 – Last Leg of Speyside 100

16 miles: starts at 9am from the car park at Inverdrurie, just past the tennis courts on the road up to Glenmore. This is an anti-clockwise walk via Loch an Eilein, over the Cairngorm Club

footbridge and down to Loch Morlich. From there the route goes up to Badaguish and then returns to the car park via the Old Logging Way. Good forest paths for the majority of this route.

Contact walk leader John Henderson to book - Johnhenderson628@btinternet.com

Saturday October 28 – Fyrish From The Far Side

19 miles: starts at 9am from the car park opposite the Co-op in Evanton (or take the 25/25A bus from Inverness and get off just before the Co-op). The route visits the spectacular Blackrock Gorge before heading into woodland to the Little Fyrish monument. We will then head for more open country up Glen Glass and Strath Mor to approach the Fryish monument (453m) from a little used track across the shoulder of Cnoc Ceislein. The descent from the monument is through forests to a cycle track to return to Evanton. The route is all on good tracks and paths and is suitable for dogs (but dogs must be on leads while in the vicinity of the steep drops of Blackrock Gorge).

Contact walk leader Bea Jefferson to book - bea_jefferson@hotmail.com

Sunday November 19 - Abriachan Forest

11 miles: starts at 9am. From Inverness take the A82 south along the side of Loch Ness. Take the steep uphill minor road on right, signed for Abriachan. Go past the loch and turn left to follow track down to the car park. The walk is very wet in places and boggy for a long stretch. There is also a steep scramble. There are stunning views of Loch Ness with an ascent of Carn na Leitire (434m). Maximum of three dogs on the walk.

To book, contact walk leader Alison Collins on

alisoncollins54@btinternet.com

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

AGM - COME AND HAVE YOUR SAY

THE North of Scotland LDWA annual general meeting is on Sunday September 24, at Edinkillie Hall, Dunphail. It is the opportunity for members to have their say on the running of the group. After the formal business of the meeting, where the new committee will be elected, there will be an open forum where members can ask questions and discuss any matters which they feel are of interest to the group. And in case you are wondering, the AGM does not usually last too long – last year's was over in under 90 minutes. The meeting will start at 1.30pm, and will be preceded by a 12 mile walk led by Pete Mitchell, which starts at 9am. To book, contact Pete (contact details above).

LAICH O'MORAY 50 ENTRY NEARS 60

AS this newsletter was being prepared, there were 59 entries for our Laich O'Moray 50, taking place over the weekend of October 7-8.

The LoM is now being organised by Stuart Nelson, who has taken over the event from current group chairman Andrew Thacker, who has had to stand down from NoS

responsibilities due to his work commitments.

Stuart – who lives in Aboyne and whose LDWA membership number is 606, which means he is one of the association's earliest members – has been seconded on to the group committee. Starting from the cricket pavilion in Grant Park, Forres, the 51 mile LoM route will be the same as it has been for the past two years – going clockwise out of Forres to Findhorn, followed by that fabulous 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 have 24 hours to complete the walk.

As this newsletter was being produced, the number of entries on the event was set to double last year's figure of 30. The event is, of course, a qualifier for next year's LDWA Speyside 100, which we are hosting and organising.

Stuart is appealing for people to help at HQ and on the checkpoints, so anyone wishing to assist should please email him on themanintheblueblazer@gmail.com

The marshals' walk was due to be held on September 9-10, organised by Graham Smith and John Henderson. As this newsletter was being prepared, three people had signed up for it.

NO S MEMBERSHIP WELL PAST 100

THERE are now 107 Primary members of North of Scotland LDWA, a significant increase on a year ago, when the figure was 90. So we are not only the youngest group in the LDWA (being founded in 2015) but we are also one of the fastest growing. We also have 137 Associate members. We extend a warm welcome to all our new members, and we look forward to seeing you on walks soon.

Meanwhile, if you're interested in the latest membership and walks statistics for both North of Scotland LDWA and the national association, you can see them here -

<https://ldwa.org.uk/NorthofScotland/W/9055/membership-walk-stats.html>

SPEYSIDE 100: COUNTING DOWN



THE big one is fast approaching. Next month, entries will open for the Speyside 100 – the LDWA's flagship event – which we are hosting. The event is over the weekend of May 25-27, with the marshals' walk on May 4-6.

The event's organising group – chaired by national LDWA chair and NoS Group founder Julie Cribb – is meeting every month, and everyone is very busy. The next meeting will be on September 20.

As this newsletter was being produced, the route – currently approximately 101 miles - was being fine-tuned.

It starts from Badaguish Outdoor Centre, near Aviemore, and the first part – a nice steady climb to a wonderful 3.5km ridge going over three sub tops to reach the 2657ft Corbett of Meall a Bhuachaille (pronounced myowl a vooachil) will probably set up the entrants for the rest of the walk. The 360 degree views are quite spectacular. Let's hope we get good weather. The whole route has been walked by Ken and Isobel Falconer, from Heart of Scotland Group,

who compiled a very useful report in which they made a few suggestions which are being taken on board. One of these is that the first leg, going to Glenmore Lodge, is now just over seven miles, rather than the 12 mile or so stretch to Forest Lodge originally planned. So Glenmore Lodge is now Checkpoint 1, with Forest Lodge Checkpoint 2. There is also a slight issue with crossing burns in the Tomintoul area, and this part is in the process of being walked out to find out what is the best, and safest, route to take here.

Despite the Corbett at the start, the total ascent of the Speyside 100 will be well under 10,000 feet, which many entrants may be surprised about considering they are walking in the Scottish Highlands.

There are 14 checkpoints, with the other 12 at Dorback Lodge, Tomintoul, Glenlivet, Ballcorach, Cromdale, Grantown-on-Spey, Nethy Bridge, Boat of Garten – the breakfast stop, which will be after approximately 67 miles – Aviemore, Kincaig, Lagganlia and Loch an Eilein. The checkpoint originally planned for Uath Lochan has now been scrapped, due to us fitting in the checkpoint at Glenmore Lodge. Nine of the checkpoints are indoors, with the other five outdoors. They are being staffed by members of LDWA groups from throughout the country, but it is likely members of NoS Group will need to assist at checkpoints where marshal numbers may fall short.

Once again, all offers to help on the Speyside 100 will be gratefully received. If you can help on either on the event or on the marshals' walk, please email Julie on julie.cribb99@gmail.com.



The wonderful view on the 'skyline route' - from the 2657ft Corbett of Meall a Bhuachaille, which walkers on the Speyside 100 will enjoy early on in the walk.

MARTYN GREAVES FUND

MARTYN Greaves – a very keen and popular LDWA member who died last year – has left the association £113,837 in his estate. A Martyn Greaves Fund has been set up, with LDWA groups asked to consider applications for a share of this money for projects which the

association's NEC deems worthy.

This was discussed at the last NoS committee meeting, in August, and – following a suggestion from Bea Jefferson – it was decided to apply for money from the fund to pay for two courses, covering 'skills in the hills', for our members.

There would be two courses involved:-

A two-day hill and mountain course of skills training at Glenmore Lodge in the Cairngorms National Park. This covers navigation skills including the use of map, compass and electronic devices; informed decision making in producing route plans; understanding of mountain weather; dealing with an emergency and understanding the role of mountain rescue; planning to avoid water hazards and how to deal with them on the hill; and what clothing and equipment to take and how to use it.

And a two-day outdoor first aid course delivered by Outfit Moray, covering emergency first aid to include managing unconsciousness in the outdoors; getting help; medical emergencies; cardiac emergencies; monitoring vital signs; environmental conditions (heat/cold injuries); moving and carrying; managing casualties; and making improvised shelters.

Our walks are often in remote areas, with challenging terrain, so we feel these courses would give huge benefits to our members in many ways, such as increasing safety on our social walks, increasing the skills of our members and demonstrating that we take safety and skills development seriously.

Should our proposal for funding be approved by the NEC, a bulk email will be sent to all group members informing them. Places on the courses will be awarded on a first-come-first-served basis.

ADVICE ON LEADING WALKS

THIS year we will have had more walks on our calendar than ever before. In fact, we also have one of the highest numbers of walk leaders than any other group in the LDWA – quite amazing considering we are the youngest group in the association, with one of the smallest memberships.

But we cover a huge area which encompasses some of the finest, most diverse – and certainly most spectacular – landscapes in Europe, and we are always looking for more people to lead walks.

Walk leaders and potential walk leaders are reminded that a route should always be walked out in advance, and it may need to be walked our more than once if necessary. And any potential difficulties for walkers – like heather bashing, water crossings and exceptionally muddy terrain – should be included in the walk description, so that walkers have a reasonable idea of what to expect. These details should then be sent to the Walks Secretary to go on the website and in Strider.

If any new members want guidance on walking out a potential new route, then please feel free to contact any member of the committee. And if you would like a committee member to accompany you on a walk recce, then don't hesitate to ask. Our committee members are here to help you, and their contact details are listed above.



Approaching the Munro Lochnagar on the Sunday.

JOINT WEEKEND IN BALLATER



By Prince Albert's Pyramid on Saturday's walk.

were planned and led by Dave Galloway from NoS. For the first walk, on Saturday, we went to the Balmoral estate and visited the huge cairns of Prince Albert's Pyramid and Princess Beatrice's Pyramid.

A TOTAL OF 16 members from both groups – plus five dogs – attended the joint North of Scotland/Heart of Scotland LDWA weekend, held in Ballater, on August 19-20.

It was the second joint weekend for our two groups, following last year's trip to Blair Atholl. Last year HoS hosted, with NoS hosting this year.

Both walks this year

These are two of 16 cairns on the Balmoral estate. Prince Albert's Pyramid is the largest, and was erected by Queen Victoria in memory of her husband Prince Albert after his death in 1861. Princess Beatrice's Pyramid commemorates the marriage of Princess Beatrice – one of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's nine children - to Prince Henry of Battenburg in 1865.



After admiring the cairns, we moved on across the moors, unfortunately encountering some rain and fierce winds which made for a very tricky crossing of the Alt na-giubhsaich burn, which was in spate. But we all managed to step or wade across, and – 15 minutes later – our efforts were rewarded with a quite magnificent low level rainbow – **see photo above**. We returned to the car park via the Balmoral distillery, having done a good 19 miles.

Sunday's walk was an absolute classic – the Munro Lochnagar, one of the best and the 21st highest, at 3789ft, of all 282. It's a fantastic walk, with a good steady ascent and a lovely plateau from which to reach the summit cairn where we enjoyed a magnificent Highland panorama. We had fine weather, and on the way down, a few of us climbed Lochnagar's 3215ft - and delightful - sub top of Meikle Pap.

This was the second NoS/HoS LDWA weekend, and it was a huge success. It is now an important part of the calendars of both groups. HoS are hosting it next year – and we are all looking forward to it.

The group pictured outside the Balmoral distillery – after it had stopped raining – on the Saturday.





ABOVE: Dave Galloway – who led the walks on both days – pictured on the summit plateau of Lochnagar.

RIGHT: Five of the party pictured on one of the sub tops of Lochnagar.





GR10 in the Pyrenees

A CAMINO JOURNEY: Part 1 – FRANCE

BEA JEFFERSON writes about her unforgettable walk through France and Spain earlier this year on traditional routes taken by pilgrims

IN the spring and early summer of 2023 I walked from Le Puy in the south-east of France to Finisterre (Fisterra) in the west of Spain along the routes of traditional pilgrim paths or ‘caminos’. This article covers my journey in France on the Via Podiensis (or GR 65) and part of the GR 10 to the Spanish border. From there I took the Camino del Norte, Camino Primitivo and Camino Finisterre, which you will be able to read more about in Part 2. The Via Podiensis runs for 749 km (465 miles) between Le Puy-en-Velay and Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port. I walked it in the 28 stages recommended by the Cicerone Press guide, with one rest day – a schedule which would easily be manageable by anybody who regularly walks long distance paths in the UK.

The route initially climbs up to the Aubrac plateau, which has wonderful upland scenery, but is high enough for snow and severe weather even in late spring. From there it drops into the Lot Valley, visiting picturesque towns such as Estaing and medieval Conques. Once the Lot Valley is left behind the scenery is less spectacular, crossing lower level agricultural land. However, meadows rich in spring flowers and historic towns and villages such as Navarrenx, Lectoure and Moissac mean that there is still plenty to see and enjoy.



The official start of the walk at the entry to Le Puy Cathedral, in south-east France.

For anybody used to walking UK long distance paths, a surprisingly high percentage of the route is on tarmac.

However, the roads are generally very quiet (unlike in Spain), so this is not detrimental to enjoyment of the walk, but can be hard on the feet.

The route is very well waymarked with red and white route indicators. I found that I didn't need to refer to the guide book route description or map at all. I had downloaded the Cicerone Press GPX file for the walk onto my phone and occasionally used

this to double-check my location. Facilities such as reasonably priced

walkers' accommodation, public toilets and water taps are superior to any I have experienced on UK long distance walks. I stayed in gîtes d'étape. These 'stopover gîtes' have (mixed gender) shared rooms, which range from traditional dormitories with bunks to small rooms with single beds. Guests are expected to bring a sheet sleeping bag and their own towel. Rucksacks are normally left with boots and walking poles in the lobby, with only the items you need overnight taken into the dormitory, in an effort to prevent the spread of bed bugs (which I didn't encounter). Most of these gîtes provide a communal evening meal which is generally three courses of good quality home-cooked food. I paid between 35 and 45 euros for dinner, bed and breakfast, which I felt was very good value for the standard of the accommodation and food provided.

I booked accommodation several weeks before I started the walk, but most walkers just phone ahead a day or two. Details of accommodation options are provided in the Cicerone guide. I was advised early in the walk to send an email or text to the accommodation provider the day before arrival to confirm my booking. It is rare for these gîtes to take deposits, so they tend to assume that there will be some no-shows. Gîtes can cater for vegetarian diets, but dietary needs should be mentioned when booking, again when confirming and once more on arrival. I appreciate that may sound a little over the top, but I had two instances of hosts ‘forgetting’ I had informed them of my dietary requirements until I reminded them on arrival. I walked the route as a lone woman, and was pleasantly surprised that the majority of walkers I encountered were female, many of them walking solo.

Most of the walkers of this route are French, with a small number of Germans, Danes and French-Canadians – walkers from the UK are a rarity. My French is very poor and I met few English speakers on the route. I managed to get by with my limited language abilities (and help from Google Translate). I found the stereotype, perceived by some, of the French being rude to those who don’t speak the language, totally unfounded. But the communal meals would have been more enjoyable had I been able to converse better with those around me. Despite the language barriers, I found myself to be part of a community, in a way I didn’t experience on the Spanish paths. I enjoyed an atmosphere which was very supportive both among the walkers and the communities we walked through. Self-service refreshment stands with drinks and snacks where only a donation was expected in payment were a regular feature of the walk. The route is well used, but doesn’t attract the numbers seen on the Spanish caminos.

At the end of the Via Podiensis I opted to take the GR10 path north-west over the Pyrenees to join the Camino del Norte at Irun, rather than continuing from Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port west on the more well-known Camino Frances route. The route over the Pyrenees was the highlight of the walk in terms of the dramatic mountain scenery. However, it was far more demanding than the Via Podiensis, particularly as weather conditions were difficult, and accommodation options were far more limited. The route was clear and well waymarked, but included some very steep and rocky sections.

If you are thinking about walking a camino, I would strongly recommend considering the Via Podiensis rather than assuming all caminos are in Spain. It is an attractive route with excellent facilities and you will meet interesting people in a supportive community of pilgrims. If you don’t have time to do the whole route, the first two weeks (to Cahors) offers

the best scenery. If you only have a week, the GR10 between Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port and Irun would be a good option if you are reasonably confident about venturing into the hills.

Part 2 of Bea’s CAMINO JOURNEY will appear in the next NoS newsletter.

LEFT: Waymarking on the route.



E2 EURO TRAIL TO JOHN o'GROATS



Some of the spectacular sea stacks at Duncansby Head, near the end of the John o'Groats Trail. A guide book to the route, *Walking The John o'Groats Trail* – written by JoGT founder Jay Wilson and author Andy Robinson – was published by Cicerone earlier this year. There is a review of the book by our group secretary Graham Smith in the current *Strider*.

trail from Spain to Cyprus.

On the Continent, the E2 mainly follows the GR5, a popular long distance path, while in the UK it connects a variety of long distance paths such as the Pennine Way and – here in Scotland - St Cuthbert's Way and the Southern Upland Way. It was always planned to continue the E2 from Stranraer by ferry to Belfast then travel across Ireland to Galway, with an alternative ending in the North of Scotland.

Due to its position in the far north east of Scotland John o'Groats is felt to be an attractive end (or start) point of a trail starting (or ending) in the far south of France. The two options

THE E2 European long distance path, currently running from Stranraer to Nice in the south of France, is to be extended to John o'Groats, and North of Scotland LDWA has been asked for views. This follows a meeting between Iain Connell, the LDWA's Long Distance Paths Officer, Steen Kobberø-Hansen, from the European Ramblers Association, Jack Cornish from The Ramblers, and John Pucknell, who has walked the 6,662 mile E4 European long distance

being considered were the John o’Groats Trail – the 145 mile long distance path starting in Inverness – or a cycle route, the Great North Trail.

Graham Smith, NoS LDWA group secretary and also a JoGT warden, was asked for his views. He told the four that our group supports an extension of the E2 to the north of Scotland and that favours the John o’Groats Trail as the route taken, as it is a proper walking trail, with an estimated 500-1,000 people walking the full length of it each year. Graham’s views are backed by Iain Connell, and he has put the four people behind the plans in contact with Ken McElroy and Jay Wilson, who set up the JoGT.

Although there are currently some walker safety issues with the trail, particularly in the northern sections, these are being addressed by the Friends of the John o’Groats Trail – a registered charity eligible for funds to cover the work – and Ken McElroy, the Trail Manager. As this newsletter was being produced, it was decided to use the JoGT as the preferred route for the E2 extension, subject to safety concerns being resolved. Contact is being sought with local government and other organisations which could help with the plans.

LDWA GOING TO PARLIAMENT

NORTH of Scotland LDWA is due to be represented at an event at the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh.

Members may recall that we are an official partner of the Inverness Festival of Walking & Wheeling, a week of walks and cycle events which took place in May. The festival was organised by the charity Paths For All, and as part of the event, Jan Adamson led a very successful 15 mile Inverness Explorer walk on May 27, and group secretary Graham Smith represented the group at a drop-in session held at Wasps Creative Academy, in Inverness, on May 20.

Now comes great news that the festival has won Path for All’s Active Travel Project of the Year 2023 award. Organiser Jayne Preece and assistant Marie Law have been invited to a parliamentary reception at the Garden Lobby of the Scottish Parliament, in Edinburgh, on September 27. Graham has been asked to join them as NoS LDWA is one of the festival partners. Said Jayne: “We would like to share this award as the festival was a collaboration between us all.”

Well done, Jayne and Marie – and everyone else involved. Winning the award is a great honour.

Inverness Festival of Walking & Wheeling is going to take place again next year, with us likely to be putting on another walk. Further details will appear on the group newsletter and website in due course.

ADDING WALKS TO OUR DATABASE

GPX files of our walks can be added to our walks database – just send them to Jan Adamson (jan_adamson@hotmail.co.uk) or Pete Mitchell (petem.nwgldwa@btinternet.com), who have both kindly agreed to upload them. Anyone can send in the files – it doesn’t have to be the walk leader. These files can only be accessed by other LDWA members, and leaders’ names and contact details are not included.

SNAPSHOTS FROM SOCIAL WALKS



AIMING HIGH:
These photos were taken on the Via Regia Dava Way Canter Loop, led by Pete Mitchell, on June 3. The walk was 20.6 miles and visited the high point of the Dava Way trail - pictured left.



HOT STUFF: These photos were taken on the Grantown North Circular, led by Mary Atkinson on June 18. The walk was 14 miles, and Mary thoughtfully changed the route from the one originally planned to avoid too much walking in the sunshine, because conditions were very hot and humid. The walk was part of the Moray Walking & Outdoor Festival and we had a special guest – Peter Smith, who lives in Pendle, Lancashire, and who was visiting the Highlands. Peter is known as ‘Pendle’ Pete.



FORWARD FROM FORRES: This 16 mile walk, led by Pete Mitchell, on July 1, went from Forres to Rafford, Loch of Blair's, Mundole, Moy and back to Forres.





A GRAHAM WITH GRAHAM: These photos were taken on Scaraben, a three summit Graham (Scottish hills of 2,000ft-2,499ft) in Caithness, on a walk led by Graham Smith on July 23. Scaraben is 2050ft, and commands wonderful views across the far north of Scotland. The four who went on the walk enjoyed plenty of sunshine – but also some fairly strong winds on the summits.





IN THE PINK: The Meall Mor walk, led by Graham Smith on July 23. Meall Mor is a 2220ft Graham in Glen Glass and the walk took in its sub top of Meall Beg before descending to Loch Glass and back via the derelict ‘pink house’ – pictured above.





LOVELY SPOT FOR A STOP: This photo was taken during a 16 mile walk on the Cromdale hills, led by Roger Boston on July 31.



WELL EARNED BREAK: The 17 mile Romach Cakes & Canter, led by Pete Mitchell on August 5, which went from Dallas Dhu to Romach Loch and back via the Dava Way.



SPLASHING TIME:
Our 18 mile walk on August 27, led by John Henderson, went to to Glen Einich and Loch an Eilein. It was a delightful walk but the heavy rain of the previous two days made some of the streams en route to Loch Einich overflow – so wet feet could not be avoided.



GOING DOWN:
The 17 mile walk on September 2, led by Pete Mitchell, went from Forres to Alves. The route was via the Dava Way, Rafford and Monaughty Forest. The 2755ft Corbett Ben Rinnes can be seen clearly in the distance in this photo.

STRIDING OUT WITH PETE

PETE Mitchell has started a 'Stride Out' WhatsApp group for all those who may be interested in a faster walking pace and want to build up to challenge events such as our Laich O'Moray 50. Challenge events usually have multiple refreshment checkpoints, so Pete would like to emulate this by including cafe stops where possible.

Pete usually has a 'Stride Out' walk (3mph+) on the first Saturday of every month. If any members know of community cafes that could be incorporated into a walk, please let him know. Pete's email address is above. All the 'Stride Out' walks are featured on our website and Facebook page.

PLEASE SEND IN YOUR STORIES

THE newsletter editor and his colleagues on North of Scotland LDWA committee hope you are enjoying these group newsletters. More stories and pictures are always needed, so please send in your contributions – maybe a story about a walk you have done with some photos, or just a photo of a walk with a caption, or maybe your views about an issue you feel may be of interest to our members. Just email your contributions to Graham Smith at n.scot.ldwa@gmail.com – they will all be gratefully received.

HEADER PHOTO: The photo at the top of this newsletter was taken by **Bea Jefferson** on the Cromdale hills walk on July 31 (see page 19).