

24 LOCH ARKAIG to GLEN SPEAN

The complete leg is some 43 miles long. It will require at least two days. The journey can be broken almost anywhere along the Great Glen, where there are numerous hotels and guest houses. There is also an excellent hostel about half a mile beyond the north end of Loch Lochy. Between Fort Augustus and Loch Laggan, the only accommodation is Luib-chonnal bothy at the east end of Glen Roy. Apart from the camping facilities at Aberarder, there is no accommodation at the end of the route. Neither is there any public transport. In order to reach the accommodation in places such as Roybridge, it is necessary to have a car waiting on the A86.

To reach the Corrieyairrack Pass, Charles and his party had to walk from Achnacarry to the far end of Loch Lochy. The shortest route would have been along the north-west bank of the loch. This route would also have avoided any encounters with military traffic along the Wade Road on the south-east bank. However, the account by Lochgarry, a member of Charles' retinue on this journey, explicitly says that they crossed the River Lochy. Furthermore, local tradition identifies the actual location of the crossing near Gairloch. If they had gone along the north-west bank of the loch, they would not have made this crossing, because their route would have taken them almost in the opposite direction via Clunes. It therefore seems that they went along Loch Lochy by the south-east bank.

Loch Arkaig to Gairloch

Landranger Map: 34
OS Maps Central Grid Reference: NN 220 870

The most direct way is take the long wooden bridge over the entrance to the River Arkaig, as it leaves the east end of Loch Arkaig. A private road then leads through Achnacarry village to the road by Loch Lochy. From here, there is no alternative but to follow this road. At the Caledonian Canal, the road turns left over the swing bridge, and continues along the B8004 for another half mile to Gairloch.

In Charles' time, the River Lochy hereabouts followed a different course from that which it has now. It was diverted during the construction of the canal. All that remains of the original course is a dry channel, overgrown with bushes. The place where Charles is said to have crossed the Lochy is in this channel. It is at the back of a derelict graveyard (NN 175 840) on the right-hand side of the road, just round the bend after crossing the swing bridge.

Distance: 4 miles (6 km)
Height of ascent: 30 feet (10 m)
Naismith time: 1 hour 13 mins

Gairloch to Glen Gloy

Landranger Map: 34
OS Maps Central Grid Reference: NN 220 910

The route continues up the main road for about one and a half miles, where it crosses the remains of Wade's military road from Fort William to Inverness. A prominent landmark, just a few yards from the Wade road, is the line of electricity pylons crossing the B8004 (NN 197 843).

On the left of the main road, Wade's road is now a track, which is followed

through a gap in the trees. Thereafter, the line through the woodland is obvious. Interesting features along the way are the remains of small stone bridges that Wade built. After a mile and half, the Wade road meets the A82 at Stronaba.

On the other side of the A82, Wade's road continues by a fence about a hundred yards from the main road. Just after the cottage at Rathliesbeag, a high forest fence prevents further progress along Wade's road. There is then is no alternative but to walk along the A82. After four hundred yards, there is gate at an opening into the forest. From this opening, a track leads through to Glen Gloy, where the route continues westwards for about half a mile to meet the A82.

Distance: 5.5 miles (9 km)

Height of ascent: 590 feet (180 m)

Naismith time: 2 hours 6 mins

Glen Gloy to Loch Oich

Landranger Map: 34

OS Maps Central Grid Reference:

NN 280 960

The route begins along the Glen Gloy road. After crossing the River Gloy by Wade's Low Bridge, the road climbs steeply past a hamlet of modern bungalows. It then turns sharply right towards Glen Gloy. At this bend, the route follows Wade's road, as it branches off to the left. Once again, it looks like a very straight farm track.

The Wade road now makes a gentle diagonal descent, and, after about a mile and half, it reaches the A82, close by the Invergloy Halt Guest House. From this point, the modern road has been built directly on top of Wade's road for most of the way to Loch Oich. Indeed, there is only one other separate piece of Wade's road still in existence over this stretch. It starts about a mile from the north-east end of Loch Lochy, and runs for three quarters

of a mile through the undergrowth between the main road and the loch.

Fortunately, it is not necessary to walk along the metalled road all the way to Loch Oich. A very attractive alternative is provided by the disused railway track between Fort William and Fort Augustus. Invergloy Halt Guest House is a conversion of the old station buildings, and the bed of the old track can be found very easily within its grounds.

The railway follows a shelf cut out of the steep hillside along the south side of the Great Glen. For most of the way, the route is over delightful grassy ground, with trees overarching high above. In many places, rhododendron bushes line the sides. There are also interesting railway relics, such as bridges and derelict station platforms. Occasionally, there are obstacles, like fallen trees or fences. However, the trees are easily bypassed. The fences can be crossed by gates or stiles.

At the beginning, the track is very close to the A82, but the road gradually veers to the left, and descends to lower levels. There are stretches where the railway is some three hundred feet above the road. The slopes down to the road are exceptionally steep and thickly wooded. Only the most intrepid scrambler would risk descending them. The track eventually merges with a forestry road for a while, but, after the forestry road turns sharply left, the disused railway line continues to the Great Glen Water Park.

This whole walk is very enjoyable, and ideal for an easy day without the problems of route finding. The views across Loch Lochy to Meall na Teanga, Meall Dubh and Sean Mheall are superb. Although the track is never very far from the A82, the traffic noise is hardly noticeable.

Distance: 9 miles (15 km)
Height of ascent: 160 feet (50 m)
Naismith time: 3 hours 5 mins

Loch Oich to Aberchalder

Landranger Map: 34
OS Maps Central Grid Reference:
NN 340 010

Apart from the ravages of time, Wade's original road over this section exists virtually as it was built. Unlike the other sections, Wade's road here has not been used as a base for constructing another road. Even the railway was built a few feet to one side.

Access to Wade's road is found very easily at the northern end of the Great Glen Water Park. Starting from the Laggan Swing Bridge, it follows the lane that goes due east, before bearing left towards the south-east shore of Loch Oich. It passes the entrance to the Great Glen Water Park, and continues for about a quarter of a mile to the end of the lane where a Great Glen Way signpost indicates the start of the path by the side of the loch. This section of Charles' route actually coincides with the Great Glen Way.

Initially, the path follows the old railway track before descending to Wade's road right by the loch. Nowadays, Wade's road is just a grassy track threading through the trees that line the shore of the loch. At some places, it is boggy and liable to flooding. Trees arch over the track along its whole length. The atmosphere is very tranquil and remote. About half way along the loch, the ruins of Invergarry Castle can be seen on the far shore about a quarter of a mile away.

At the northern end of Loch Oich, a kissing gate marks the place to turn left, and follow a path across a meadow to the canal. The route continues by the canal to the Aberchalder Swing Bridge on the A82.

Distance: 4.5 miles (7 km)
Height of ascent: 0 feet (0 m)
Naismith time: 2 hours 24 mins

Aberchalder to Ardachy

Landranger Map: 34
OS Maps Central Grid Reference:
NH 390 070

From Aberchalder to Fort Augustus, Wade's road coincides with the A82. It is necessary for the walker to use the dismantled railway track once again. This track is picked up, where it crosses the A82 between Aberchalder and the Bridge of Oich. Here, the railway was built on raised artificial banks that provide an obvious landmark on each side of the road. The first twenty yards of the track are now overgrown with an impenetrable thicket. This section is avoided by entering the meadow by the gates on either side of the track, and walking along the base of the bank until the track becomes clear. It is then possible to clamber up the bank on to the track.

Thereafter, the route is obvious. Occasionally, there are obstacles, such as fallen trees and patches of tall undergrowth, but they can always be bypassed easily. After about three miles, where the track passes by Loch Llanagan, the undergrowth is so thick, that it is necessary to escape to the A82. This point is very close to the turn-off to Ardachy. From the A82, the lane to Ardachy is followed for about a quarter of a mile.

Distance: 3 miles (5 km)
Height of ascent: 0 feet (0 m)
Naismith time: 1 hour 0 mins

If Fort Augustus, with its hotels and guest houses, is the immediate destination, the railway track can be resumed a little further on. However, this concession is only temporary, because there are more obstacles to be negotiated or avoided by diverting to the A82. Just outside Fort Augustus, the railway track is blocked by houses built right across it.

Ardachy to Glen Roy

Landranger Map: 34

OS Maps Central Grid References:

NH 420 050, NN 420 990

A signpost on the right-hand side indicates where the lane to Ardachy crosses Wade's road over the Corrieyairack Pass. Being about two miles from Fort Augustus, this junction must be very close to the place where Charles joined Wade's road.

The original road is virtually intact. First, it follows the bottom of a valley, and then climbs sharply left, towards open moorland. On the way, the road crosses a bridge, which to-day is almost as Wade built it.

In summer, the going is very easy. However, when two or three feet of snow cover the road, progress can be painfully slow. Moreover, Wade's road serves as a channel for streams of melted snow draining downhill. In these conditions, it is essential to allow plenty of time, have suitable footwear, and be able to cope with extremely cold wet feet.

At the top of the pass, the route leaves Wade's road to climb the ridge of Carn Leac (NN 408 977), immediately on the right. At the summit, there are magnificent views across Glen Roy towards the Creag Meaghaidh on the southern horizon.

From here, the task of finding the route down to Glen Roy is made easy by a line of rusty fence posts. The first stage is an easy descent due south down heather-covered slopes to the bealach at the head of Coire Cuil. The route then ascends the broad northern ridge of Creag a' Chail, before finally descending into Glen Roy near the bothy at Luib-chonnal.

Distance: 11 miles (17.5 km)

Height of ascent: 3100 feet (940 m)

Naismith time: 3 hours 4 mins

Glen Roy to Glen Spean

Landranger Map: 34

OS Maps Central Grid Reference:

NN 420 930, NN 440 900

The first objective is the long ridge that descends from the Creag Meagaidh plateau. At the foot of Creag a' Chail, the line of fence posts continues to be an invaluable guide. It first leads to the ridge, Creag a' Bhanain, two miles across Glen Roy. It then follows the dog-leg line of the ridge to Meall Ptarmigan (NN 425 904).

The next stage is a long steep pull due south up to the northern edge of Coire Arder. The only way of descending into Coire Arder safely is to follow its edge south-westwards for about three quarters of a mile to the entrance of a scree gully, known as 'The Window'. It can be descended to Lochan a' Choire without difficulty. The remainder of the route simply follows the path along Allt Coire Arder, as it loops round to Loch Laggan.

Distance: 9 miles (15 km)

Height of ascent: 2610 feet (790 m)

Naismith time: 4 hours 19 mins

Gaelic Place Name Details

<i>Name</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Carn Leac	karn ly-ek	peak of the slab
Coire Arder	kora arder	corrie of the high thicket
Coire Cuil	kora kool	corrie of the nook or back corrie
Creag a' Chail <i>should be</i>		
Creag a' Chall	krehk a khal	rock of the loss
Creag a' Bhanain	krehk a vaanin	rock of the fair-haired man
Creag Meaghaidh	krehk meggi	
Lochan a' Choire	lokh-an a khora	small lake of the corrie
Luib-Chonnal	loob khonnal	bend of the whirlpool
Meall Dubh	myowl doo	black hill
Meall na Teanga	myowl na changa	hill of the tongue