

25 GLEN SPEAN to LOCH ERICHT

This leg of some 16 miles can be completed in one day. Apart from the very basic Culra Lodge and Ben Alder Cottage, there is no accommodation. The expedition is a serious undertaking. It should be attempted only by those who have the necessary experience and physical fitness to walk long distances carrying heavy packs. At the same time, it is most rewarding. The feeling of isolation in such mountain grandeur is exhilarating.

Once again, none of the contemporary accounts gives precise details as to Charles' route in this sector. However, there are sufficient clues to be reasonably sure that he would have used the following route, or something very close to it.

Glen Spean to Culra

Landranger Map: 42

OS Maps Central Grid References:

NN 530 870, NN 530 800

The fact that Charles and his companions rested in Coire an Iubhair Mor, on the north side of Geal Charn, is a good indication, that they walked round the north-east end of Loch Laggan. It is most unlikely that they would have chosen a longer route by going round the south-west end of the loch.

While the four miles of metalled road from Aberarder to the north-east end of the loch may well deter all but the purist, the walk does provide superb views across Loch Laggan to Geal Charn. However, most people will prefer to take a car to Kinloch Laggan in order start the walk from the entrance to the Ardverikie estate.

The route follows the forest road to Kinloch (NN 534 888), where it is necessary to turn left up another forest road. After about half a mile, it reaches open moorland.

Here, the route strikes due south by the Allt a Mhuillinn. After about a mile and a half, it crosses another estate road, and continues southwards to the shallow valley of Allt Mhainistair. The Allt Mhainistair is followed up its western bank over peaty terrain for three miles to the entrance of a barren wind-swept corrie below the summit of Geal Charn.

From this point (NN 514 820), the path descends in an easterly direction for two miles to the River Pattack. The route then follows the river southwards to Loch Pattack, and for a further two miles along a good path to Culra Lodge, where it is possible to spend the night, but with no facilities provided.

Distance: 10 miles (16 km)

Height of ascent: 1650 feet (500 m)

Naismith time: 4 hours 2 mins

The Bothies

Landranger Map: 42

OS Maps Central Grid Reference:

NN 530 800

The contemporary accounts say the bothy, in which Lochiel and Cluny had been living for several weeks, was at 'Mellaneuir'. On present-day maps, this is believed to be Meallan Odhar (NN 530 800), the east shoulder of Geal Charn. In practice, the bothy is likely to have been in the glen at the foot of this hill. In fact, there is a very old ruin, which must have been a bothy, just to the north of Loch Pattack. However, there is no evidence that this was the bothy used by Cluny and Lochiel.

The bothy at Culra must have been close to the present Culra Lodge. There are now no ruins that might mark the actual site.

Culra to Ben Alder Bay

Landranger Map: 42

OS Maps Central Grid Reference:

NN 530 720

According to tradition, Charles went to Ben Alder Bay along the shore of Loch Ericht. The stretch between Culra and the loch is an extensive flat peat bog, through which there is no path. It is impossible to maintain the direct south-easterly line, because the way is continually blocked with peat hags full of water. In threading a way across, there may be many detours, and backtracking over ground that has led to a dead-end. As the crow flies, the distance across the bog is only two and half miles, but it may well require a very frustrating and exhausting two hours.

Along, the shore of Loch Ericht, there is a good path all the way to Ben Alder Bay. The bothy, Ben Alder Cottage, is close to the loch shore. It provides very basic accommodation.

Distance: 6.5 miles (10 km)

Height of ascent: 130 feet (40 m)

Naismith time: 2 hours 4 mins

Cluny's Cage

Landranger Map: 42

OS Maps Central Grid Reference:

NN 530 720

The traditional site for Cluny's Cage is 300 feet up the hillside directly behind the bothy.

On the Ordnance Survey maps, the site is marked as 'Prince Charlie's Cave'. It can be identified very easily as a distinct formation of boulders, just a few yards to the right of the path by the stream.

The boulders comprise a large horizontal rock platform, big enough to be used as a base for a wooden cabin. Underneath, there is a small network of caves that could easily serve as a lower storey. Thus, this site bears a superficial resemblance to the contemporary description of Cluny's Cage. However, there are reasons for believing that this is not the site. In particular, the surrounding area is not 'full of great stones and crevices and some scattered wood interspersed'.

A more convincing site for Cluny's Cage is about a quarter of a mile further west in a corrie at the 1600 feet contour. This corrie has a sloping floor, strewn with thousands of gigantic boulders, many of which could fit the contemporary description. In addition, there is a cliff face. Being much higher than the traditional site, the corrie has much better views in all directions. It is also unlikely that military patrols would venture up to such a relatively inaccessible place.

Gaelic Place Name Details

<i>Name</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Translation</i>
Allt Mhainistair	alt vanistair	stream of the goat enclosure
Allt a Mhuillinn	alt a voolin	stream of the mill
Coire Iubhair Mòr	kora yoo-ar mohr	large corrie of the yew tree
Geal Charn	gyal kharn	white cairn
Meallan Odhar	myowlan oh-ar	dun mountain