

## **Walks The Dava Moor**

There are several routes that can be taken to explore this area. The estate has over recent years created more landrover roads and other hill and sheep tracks criss-cross the moor. Please respect the seasonal activities of the estate, especially during spring and autumn, when nesting birds and grouse shooting are active.

### **1: Lochindorb to Loch an t-Sidhean**

From the A939 take the minor road from Dava junction to Lochindorb and drive along the loch shore, past the famous castle, to park just before the road turns to the right at the western end of the loch. Here on the left, a hill track leads to the abandoned farm of Drumroy and south across the western moorland of the Dava. A place which is often described as an isolated, empty, wild, wilderness and home to only grouse. Yet the numerous abandoned ruins and place name evidence reveal a once vibrant, populous community with a rich Gaelic culture, working and living with nature, albeit in extreme weathers.

The track crosses Allt Loch an t-Sidhean and to the left a small path heads up to a fenced field. To the left of the path, a burnt heather clad hillock is the shian or fairy hill, which though no longer marked on maps, is recorded in the place names of the immediate area: Allt Loch an t-Sidhean, Rygean, Loch an t-Sidhean and Blaair Loch an t-Sidhean. At the southern end of the field a fallen tree and a few stones are all that's left of Rygean (shieling of the fairy hill). The track goes on to Loch an t-Sidhean or return to the main track on the right, which gradually climbs towards the pass between Cam Sgriob and Carn Slioch. This is an old route from Lochindorb to the Dulnain and Spey and may have been that taken by Edward I and his army in 1303. Returning by the same route, small detours can be made to explore the ruins of Cairnloch and the former township of Glentarroch.

### **2: Lochindorb to Shendale**

Beyond the entrance to Lochindorb Lodge, on the left and almost where the plantation stops, a track leads through to Corrycharcle (hoop shaped corrie). Formerly abandoned, it has now been restored as a lunch hut for estate guests, out shooting on the 'Glorious Twelfth'. Like many of the abandoned farms on the moor, it was probably a shieling and appears on Pont's 16th century map. Later it's recorded as an improvement and was long held by the Frasers, an old Dava family, who also had connections to Easter and Wester Limekilns. It's a bit surreal standing here among the last remnants of an ancient forest, surrounded by a variety of trees covered in lichens and mosses. Hard to believe such an oasis exists on the Dava. As the road climbs Carn nan Gabhar (hill of the goats), take time to look back over to Lochindorb and its castle. The 13th century fortalice was built by the Comyn family, opponents to

Bruce in the Wars of Independence. Its most famous resident was Alexander Stewart, the Wolf of Badenoch whose notoriety arose for burning Elgin Cathedral, following his excommunication. It later passed into the hands of the Douglas family and was ordered to be demolished following their fall from grace in 1455.

Descend the other side to the House of Glengour. Once a substantial residence, only the back wall and gables remain. Behind it, hidden in the gorse bushes, is the older Glengour settlement. The encroaching gorse has almost engulfed the remaining buildings and well preserved corn drying kiln.

Returning back down the hill to the track, follow it right and patches of green fields are visible in the distance. Clues that further settlements were once here. The first is Ryluachrach (shieling of the rushes) and a little further on Shendale (old meadow). Camerons once lived here until the late 19th century. Probably giving up the struggle, once the railway to Inverness and Perth opened a station at Dava in 1863.

### **3: Routes from the Jesus Saves Stone**

The final walk on the western side of the A939 starts at 'The Jesus Saves' stone. A well-known landmark to drivers in the area, its origins are somewhat now an urban myth. Several explanations have been put forward, but the one recounted to me by a native Dava resident, recounts a motorcyclist came off his bike and was saved by the stone from certain death. In gratitude he painted it with the familiar inscription. The road was realigned and originally the boulder was on the other side. Whatever the origin of the story, there's at least one anonymous individual who religiously maintains the boulder and ensures a fresh coat of paint is applied as required. Perhaps the fairies, residing in the fairy hill (Sidhean an Aiteil), close to the Jesus Saves Stone were also as benevolent to passers-by in an earlier age. The track from here joins the Old Military Road passed Loch Mhic Leoid to Anaboard. The stretch beyond Anaboard to Camerory still has hollows on either side, where stones were quarried for its construction in 1755. It's not hard to imagine Redcoats patrolling this area between Fort George and Corgarff or the cattle drovers that passed this way south to the trysts at Falkirk and Crieff.

From Loch Mhic Leoid the track west leads past Loch na Cloiche Muilinn (loch of the mill stone) probably due to its round shape, and up to Easter and Wester Crannich (place of trees). Once home to MacDonalDs, well known fiddle players here about, the farm steading retains some interesting features. There's a circular structure retained by a low dyke, that was once the area where the horses walked round, powering the corn thrasher in the barn. Within the roofless barn the walls still retain large rotting tree trunks or couples, which once supported the thatched roof. Until the early 20th century, many properties in the area were still roofed with divots and heather thatch. The houses gradually became

slated once cheaper slates from Wales could be obtained, imported by the railways. The out buildings had to make do with corrugated iron sheets, which now make colourful rust red blotches in the landscape.

The next property is Rychorrach (steep shieling or sheep shieling) which was still semi occupied by the Smith family of Dreggie until the early 1970's. Perched on the side of Carn Ruigh Chorrach (484 m,1587 ft), it looks south over the moor towards the Cairgorms, a great view when the hills are capped with snow. The track eventually joins up at Glengour where it can be linked to walks 1 or 2, or return to the Jesus Saves Stone.

#### **4: Dava to Sgor Gaoithe and Ourack**

The eastern side of the Dava moor was less populated and suited to agriculture. From the A939 at Dava, a hill track from the Dava Way heads up hill towards Aittendow (place of black juniper). The former farm house is built near the old shieling of Rue Uan (shieling of the lamb) and the ruins of the original Aittendow are further east. There is some confusion on the Ordinance Survey maps for this area. Names of settlements and hills have been allocated to different features, according to the original 18th and 19th century estate maps. South of Aittendow a lone larch tree marks the site of Rychraggan (shieling of the rocks) long inhabited by the Paterson family.

Tracks can be followed making for the summit of Carn na Glaisneach (hill of the horse hollow) and beyond to Carn Bad na Caorach (hill of the sheep clump 477m. 1564 ft)

From the cairn head north east to the fence that bisects the hill road from Auchnagallin to Ourack. Follow the fence from the gate to the rocky outcrop of Sgor Gaoithe (rock of the wind). On the watershed between Strathspey and the Dava Moor, it has one of the finest panoramic views. It exposes to all the senses, what the Dava conveys to so many that have lived or walked it.

Follow the hill road that was probably the Via Regia, due north past the solitary chimney stack of Badahad, a former gamekeepers isolated residence and by the burn crossing a ford, beside the remains of the shieling of Allt Tarsin. The road turns left up the hill back to Aittendow, but a little beyond the bend on the opposite bank the ruins of the Ourack are worth a visit.