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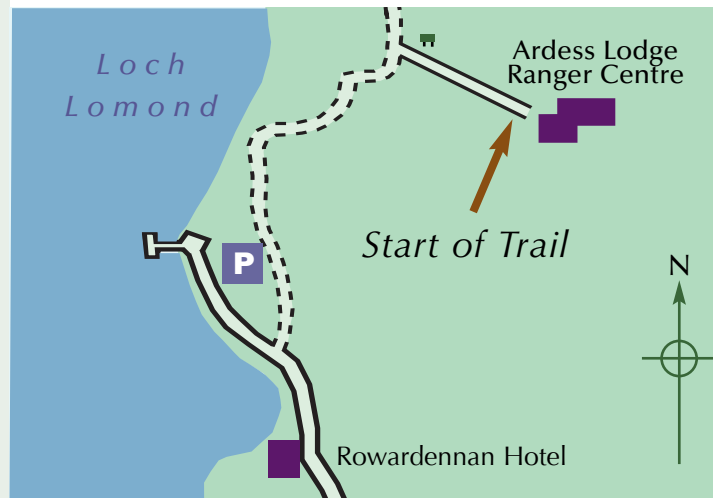
a place for everyone

The National Trust for Scotland works to conserve and present our nation's heritage. We are a charity and rely upon the support of our members and visitors. Please join us today by filling in the membership leaflet.

The NTS Ranger Service at Ben Lomond carefully manages the cultural and natural heritage of this important property. If you have any questions or comments please call into the Ranger Centre or contact us at:

NTS Ben Lomond Ranger Service, Ardess Lodge,  
Rowardennan, By Drymen, G63 0AR.  
Tel: 0844 493 2217  
Email: benlomond@nts.org.uk

**For more information on archaeology at  
NTS sites visit [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk)**



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## THE ARDESS HIDDEN HISTORY TRAIL



### Human impact

At first glance Ben Lomond appears a wild and untouched place. But for hundreds of years people have worked this land and altered it in the process.

As you walk the trail, you will find many bracken-covered mounds of stone. In fact these are the ruins of houses, farm buildings and field-walls.

They are reminders of an active community of farming families living by the banks of Loch Lomond several hundred years ago.

*In the heather, amongst  
the bracken and under  
the oaks, the archaeology  
of Ardess is waiting  
to be explored ...*



Houses at Ardess were once similar to these reconstructions at the Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore



Artist's impression of 18th-century life at Ardess (site 11)

## In the fields

Miles of stone and turf dykes marked property boundaries and prevented animals from grazing on the crops.

'Rig and furrow' was the common form of cultivation from the 16th century to the 19th century. The rigs were long built-up lines of earth, cattle-dung and organic materials, which provided a fertile strip for growing crops such as oats and barley. The furrows were dips that helped drainage.

In order to ensure a fair division of arable land, each year tenants drew lots to decide which rigs they would cultivate.



School pupils surveying a building at site 11

## A busy community

Most of the sites on the trail were built two to four hundred years ago. During this time the area would have been more heavily populated than today.



The local inhabitants grew crops and grazed cattle, goats and sheep. In the summer months, families took their animals up to higher pastures and lived in shielings (small seasonal stone and turf buildings). Here they tended the animals and prepared dairy products. With the approach of autumn, the families left the shielings to prepare for the harvest and the annual cattle markets in Falkirk and Stirling.

Rob Roy MacGregor owned land around Ardess from 1711 to 1713. The property was confiscated when he was declared bankrupt and branded an outlaw.



Look for the faint traces of rig and furrow at site 3

## A forgotten past

About 250 years ago, the system of farming began to be replaced with large-scale sheep grazing. Later, the Rowardennan area became popular with rich gentry for game shooting.

With no role for small-scale farming, many families moved away to the cities or emigrated from Scotland. By the early 1800s all but one of the houses on the trail were abandoned.

The people who once lived here spoke Gaelic. Ardess is Gaelic for the high (*ard*) waterfall (*eas*), referring to the prominent waterfall on the slopes above. Many other local names have since been lost or forgotten.

Very few archaeological studies have been carried out into settlements of this period. Only recently has this neglected area of Scotland's heritage become the subject of extensive examination.

*The sites on this trail have not yet been excavated by archaeologists. We can only speculate on these ruins from written records and work elsewhere. Any number of secrets and surprises could lie below your feet!*

**1** In the 19th century, Victorian gentry came game hunting at Ardess. The stone kennels at the foot of this slope, the abundant rhododendrons and hunting lodge by the loch (now the Youth Hostel) all date from this period.

**2** Beside the small burn at the foot of the slope, you can see the stone base of a building, thought to be a house last in use 250 years ago. It is well placed for getting water, but the midges must have been irritating neighbours!

**3&4** Look closely at the ground. You can see the faint undulating lines of agricultural rig and furrow (see over).

**5** You are now moving up to the hillside grazing areas. This turf and stone 'head dyke' marked where cultivation ended and livestock grazing began.

**6** Iron was once smelted at a furnace on this hillock. Bog iron (an orangey silty substance) was collected in streams and wet hollows, while the nearby trees provided the vast amounts of charcoal needed for fuel.

Once smelted (separated by intense heat) the iron was either shaped here or taken to a blacksmith to make tools and weapons.

The surrounding small grassy mounds consist



of the 'slag' waste product. If you search carefully you can see these heavy, almost metallic, pieces of rock. Please do not take

these away as they are important pieces of Ardess's heritage!

Further along the trail are the stone footings of a building. Perhaps it was connected with the iron smelting work?

**7** The oak woodland was planted in the late 18th century. The timber and bark served several purposes, from use in industrial leather-making to building material and fuel.

The traces of buildings and agriculture suggest that several families may have been displaced when the woods were planted.

Native tree species such as holly, hazel and rowan are making a comeback because the Trust has erected fences to protect them from grazing sheep and wild deer.

**8** Archaeologists think that these stones may be the outer wall of a house. If so, it shows how people were trying to build in difficult positions. Maybe at one time land for building was scarce?

**9** The outlines of a turf building can be seen here. The rounded corners and the lack of visible stones might mean that it is different from the other buildings on the trail, either in function or age.

**10** This house was still inhabited in 1866. A map from this date shows it roofed and called Tigh an Eas (House by the Water). This house is both the best preserved and the largest on the trail.

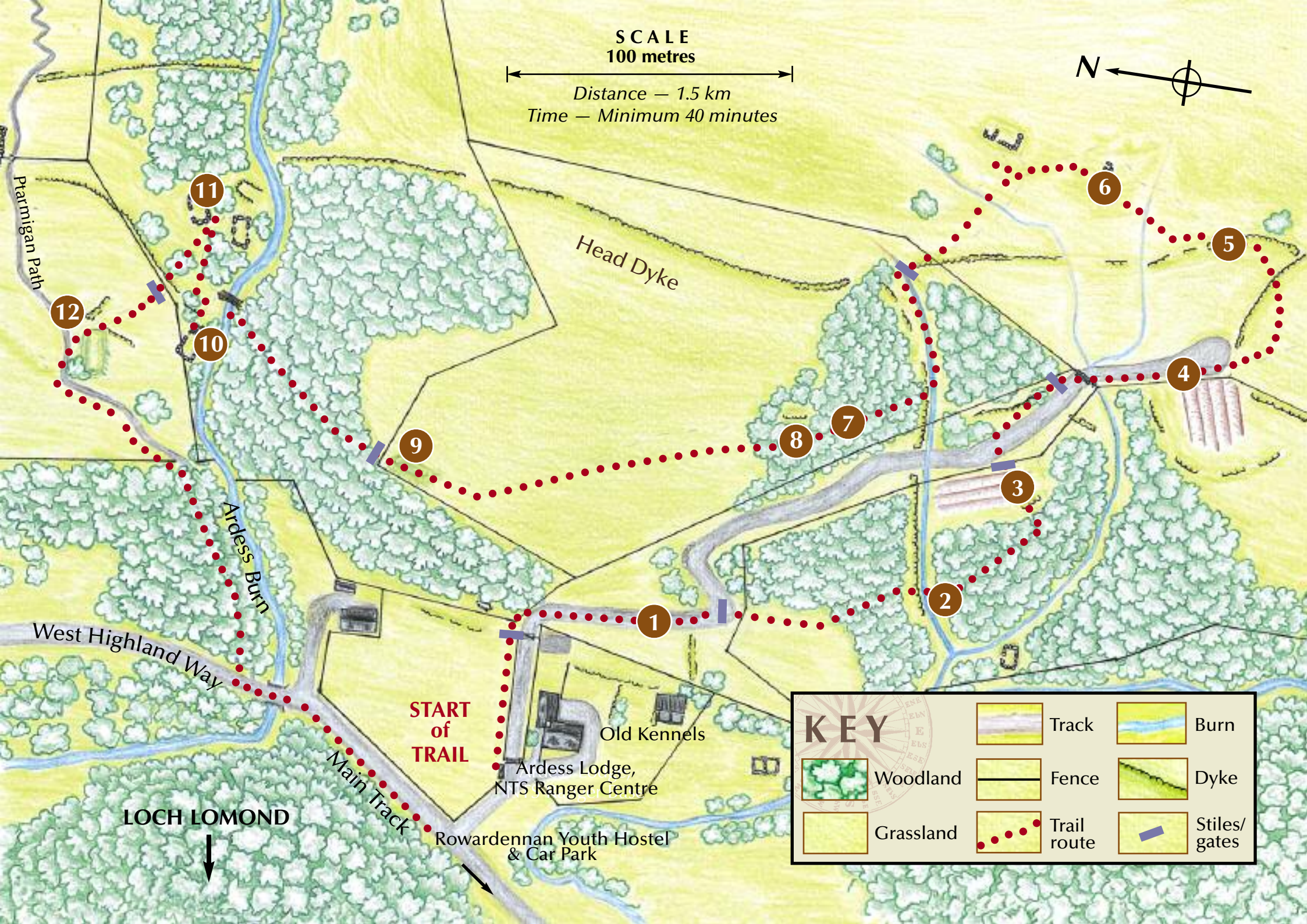
**11** Here you can see the remains of two houses with substantial stone walls. It is likely that they were in use at the same time. If you look around you can see other features including traces of stone dykes and a large rectangular hollow, which may have been a stone quarry.

**12** You are now standing next to the remains of a long building, most likely separated into living quarters and animal byre. The nearby burn and access to water may account for the cluster of buildings in this area.

*We hope that you enjoyed this trail and will keep your eyes open elsewhere for more of Scotland's hidden history.*

SCALE  
100 metres

Distance — 1.5 km  
Time — Minimum 40 minutes



**KEY**

	Track		Burn
	Woodland		Dyke
	Grassland		Trail route
	Fence		Stiles/gates

LOCH LOMOND



Rowardennan Youth Hostel & Car Park

Old Kennels

START  
of  
TRAIL

Main Track

Ardess Burn

Head Dyke

Plamigan Path

West Highland Way