



the National Trust
for Scotland
a place for nature

Ben Lomond

Ardess Hidden History Trail

Description

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.

Grade

Easy / Moderate

Terrain

The path is unsurfaced and care should be taken on the steeper sections.

Distance

1.5 km

Time

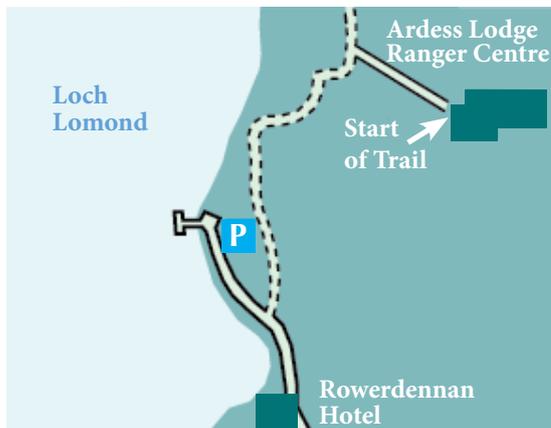
40 minutes minimum

OS Map

Landranger Sheet 56

Facilities

Parking
Toilets
Dogs welcome on lead



The Trust is supported by



A BUSY COMMUNITY

Most of the sites on the trail were built 200–400 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. As autumn approached the families left the shielings to prepare for the harvest and the annual cattle markets in Falkirk and Stirling.

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 consisted of 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.

FORGOTTEN PAST

About 250 years ago, rig and furrow cultivation began to be replaced with large-scale sheep grazing. Later, the area around Rowerdennan 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 most 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.



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Stone remains under the trees at site 2



Rig and Furrow, sites 3 and 4 Philip Halling



Bog iron

- 1 In the 19th century, Victorian gentry came hunting at Ardess. The stone kennels at the foot of the slope and the hunting lodge by the loch (now the Youth Hostel) both date from this period.
- 2 Beside the small burn at the foot of the slope you can see the stone base of a building (left), thought to be a house or mill last in use 250 years ago. It is well placed for getting water, but the midges must have been irritating neighbours!
- 3 If you look closely, you can see the faint, undulating lines of rig and furrow (see 'In the fields' description). This pre-dates the present oak woodland.
- 4
- 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, the site of which may be marked by the stones here. Bog iron (an orangey, silty substance) was collected from wet ground, while nearby woodlands, now gone, 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 ground here is much greener as turf has grown over piles of 'slag', the waste product from the smelting process. Around 40m further on are the stone footings of a building, perhaps 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.



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Handle from an iron griddle found at site 9



Fragment of clay tobacco pipe found at site 9



Reconstructed houses at the Highland Folk Museum, Newtonmore, similar to those at Ardess



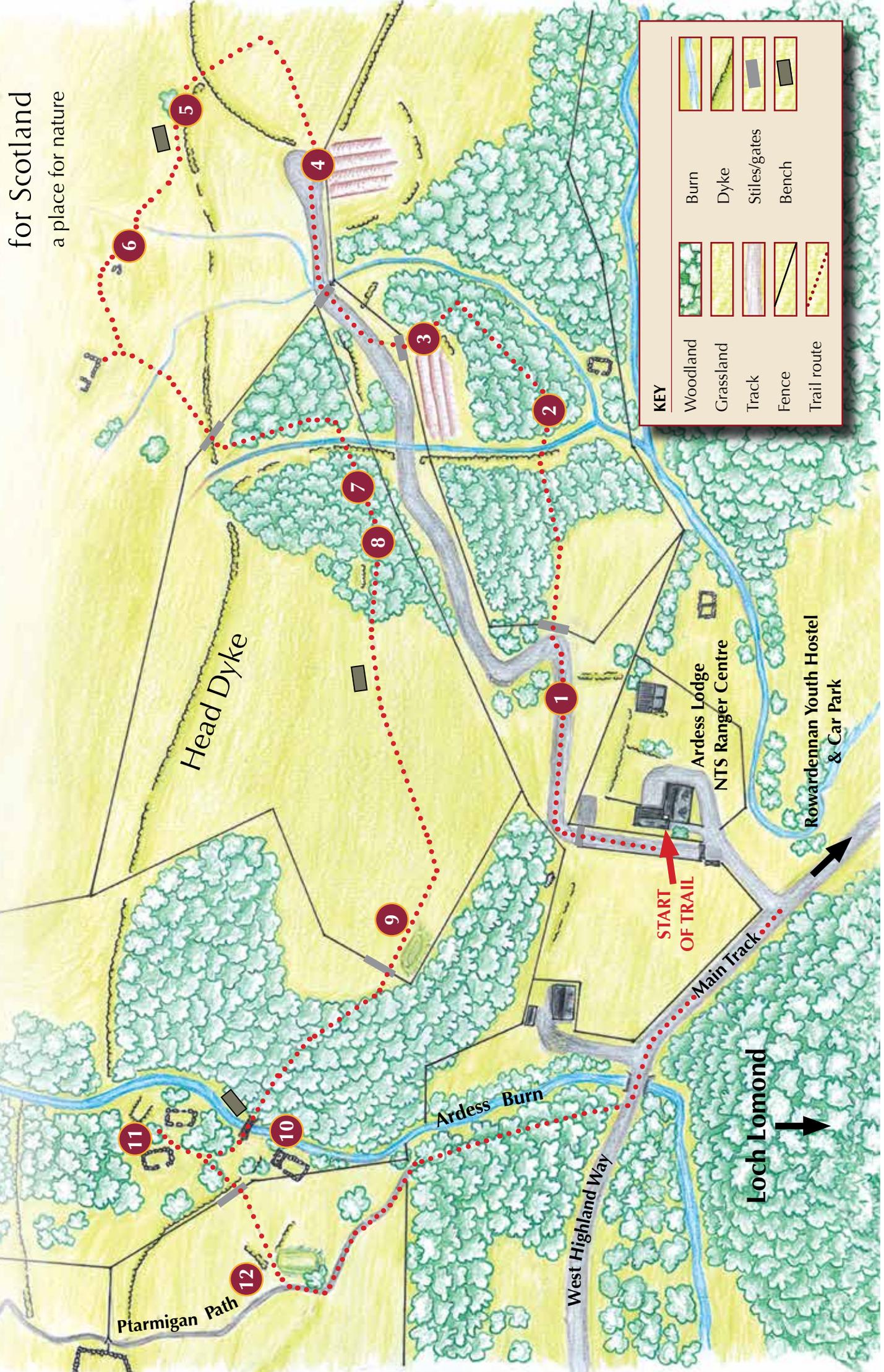
Uncovering the remains of two houses at site 11

- 8** It is not clear what this stone bank is for. It is possibly to create a working platform linked either with a house site or charcoal production.
- 9** The outlines of a turf building can be seen here. It may have been lived in for a short time by people working in the woods. The 1851 census shows an entry for a Rowchnock wood hut (or hut in the woods), which would fit with this site. The occupants are named as Robert and Catherine Clark, aged 24 and 20 respectively at the time, with Robert working as a woodcutter. This occupation fits perfectly with what we know was going on in the area at the time. Excavation has revealed the entrance, a lot of 19th-century pottery and a handle for an iron griddle for cooking over an open fire. Pieces of clay tobacco pipes were also found. One piece (left) shows a picture of a steam train, probably Stevenson's *Rocket* of 1829.
- 10** This large stone-walled house is marked on a map from 1866 and named Tigh an Eas (House by the Water). Excavation showed it has a door facing north and a well-cobbled floor at the west end. Finds included window glass, iron nails, pottery, bottles and shirt buttons. This house was probably home to the shepherd who used the large sheepfold uphill to the north.
- 11** Here among the oak trees you can see the remains of two houses. They both had large boulders as foundations but probably had turf walls. Excavation revealed only some bottle glass. Given the lack of finds and the method of construction, these buildings may date from the 18th century.
- 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.

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KEY	
	Woodland
	Grassland
	Track
	Fence
	Trail route
	Burn
	Dyke
	Stiles/gates
	Bench