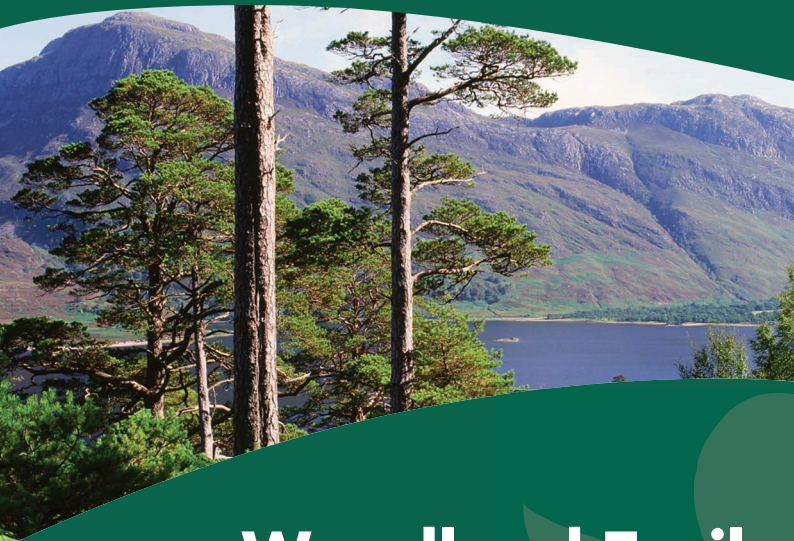


Beinn Eighe

National Nature Reserve



Woodland Trail



NatureScot

Scotland's Nature Agency
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba



Scotland's
National Nature
Reserves



A wood of possibilities

Welcome to Beinn Eighe. This is a place so special for wildlife, scenery and geology that in 1951 it became Britain's very first National Nature Reserve. Since then, its importance has been internationally recognised, including through the United Nations.

But don't worry. People are also a valued part of the Beinn Eighe scene. NatureScot owns the bulk of the land here and is happy for visitors to explore the reserve. It asks only that you respect the needs of wildlife and of other people during your visit.

The Woodland Trail is a great way to experience some of Beinn Eighe's qualities, whatever the season. The Scots pine trees for which the reserve is famed are a constant feature, of course. But have you seen their trunks glow orange-red in the evening, or noticed how the bark is patterned like a jigsaw puzzle? Have you heard a crossbill calling from a pine top or noticed the signs that show a pine marten has crossed a path?

Such things are all possible here, with seasonal changes adding even more variety. Whether you come when birch trees flare yellow and gold in autumn or when the first birds sing in spring; whether there is snow on the ground or sun on your back, Beinn Eighe is a pleasure.

Enjoy your visit.





Woodland Trail — — —

A spectacular walk through old pine and birch wood on the lower slopes of Beinn Eighe with wonderful views across Loch Maree to the stunning mountain Slioch. Go clockwise to benefit from the seats on the ascent.

Mostly a narrow hill path with 550 metre steep ascent and 700 metre descent. Uneven surface and irregular stone steps. One stream crossing and muddy sections.



strenuous

1 1/4 miles /
1.8 km
Allow 1 hour

Remember the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Respect other people's privacy and their need for quiet enjoyment. Keep dogs under control and treat Beinn Eighe with care, leaving it undisturbed and free of litter.

Getting started

There's no rush, so take time to get your bearings in the car park. The plinths here have useful information about local geology, history and bird life, and you can look at a map in the open-sided shelter before using the one in this booklet.

1 Voices in the stream

Birches are the main trees here, a sign that the ground is fairly fertile. In the past, Highland people used birch in many ways. Wooden containers, brooms and dyes are some of the uses that would have been known to locals who walked beside this burn.

Called Allt na h-Airighe (Burn of the Sheiling), the name shows that this could have been a route to grazings where livestock would be taken in summer to keep them away from fields near the loch. There are many Gaelic names for landscape features in the reserve, some dating back to medieval times. Listen to the rises and falls in the sounds of the burn and breeze and imagine what speech you might once have heard here.



2 Caledonian pines

Now you're close to the first of the tall Scots pines along the trail. This is the world's most widespread cone-bearing tree, as familiar to someone in Siberia as it is to someone in Scotland. But the Scots pines in their namesake country are special. They've developed in a climate that is much more moist, thanks to ocean-driven rain, than that on the continent.

Pines have grown at Beinn Eighe for at least 9,300 years. Some of the chemicals in their resin are ever so slightly different from those in native pines in the central Highlands. So if Scottish Scots pines are a race apart, the ones at Beinn Eighe are even more distinctive.



3 Think like an eagle

Continuing uphill, you'll reach a bench at this point. The view is superb, out over the tops of pines at mid-levels of the slope below, across Loch Maree to Slioch and east to the braided river mouth at Taagan.

Depending on the weather, you could notice anything from a distant waterfall to bog mosses on the ground close by. Even seated, you can feel that you're getting an eagle's-eye view of forest, loch and hill. Golden eagles do hunt over this ground, as do several other birds of prey, including peregrine falcon and sparrowhawk. The white-tailed eagle now also sometimes hunts the area, thanks to its reintroduction to Scotland in recent decades.



4 Newfound links

The trees closest to the bench are young, but if you look around, there are also many older, broad-crowned Scots pines. Some of these grew as seedlings when the ground was bared after severe fires that destroyed many trees more than 300 years ago.

Much more recently, in pine lifetime terms, many trees in this part of the wood were felled in the 1940s. Pioneer Corps lumberjacks from Newfoundland (then still linked to Britain, later part of Canada) did the felling towards the end of the Second World War. The pine timber was used to make sturdy ammunition boxes.

Intriguingly, this trans-Atlantic link is echoed by fossils – trilobite species from hundreds of millions of years ago – that are now known principally from the west Highlands, Greenland, Spitsbergen and Canada. They show, amazingly, that some 540 million years ago these distant areas lay close to what is now Scotland.





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Mountain Trail

Allt na h-Airighe

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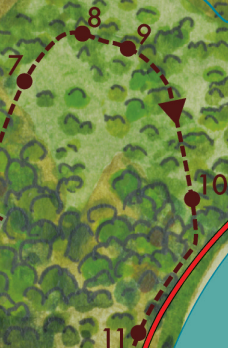
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5 Bloom and berry

Still among young pines, but with less of a broad view, this is a good spot to focus on some of the plants beneath the trees.

Heather is one of the main shrubs nearby. It has woody stems and flowers that blush purple in August and September, then fade to rusty brown through autumn.

Heather grows best here, where the canopy is open enough for plenty of sunshine to reach the pinewood floor. It shares the ground with many kinds of mosses, grasses, sedges and another attractive shrub – blaeberry.

Named for its dark-blue fruit, blaeberry can play an important part in the life of pinewood creatures, including forest grouse, in some parts of Scotland. Blaeberry leaves also add miniature fireworks of autumn colour to the forest floor before they fall.



6 Reach out and touch time

This is the high point of the Woodland Trail. Follow the path and take a short spur, past a beautifully time-smoothed fallen pine, to the viewpoint plinth. There's a great outlook from here, but it's also worth looking at the rocks used to build the plinth.

They're arranged like a simple model of how rocks are most commonly layered in the mountains here. Oldest, at the base, are grey-banded stones of Lewisian gneiss. Much altered by heat and pressure over vast sweeps of planetary change, they are up to 2.5 billion years old.

Next come red-coloured Torridonian sandstones, laid down as sandy outwash from huge rivers some 800 million years ago. On top sit stones of Cambrian quartzite, compressed from sands deposited in warm, tropical seas around 540 million years ago. Slightly younger, trilobite-bearing rocks that occur here, known as 'Furoid Beds', are not included in the plinth. They are too soft to use as building blocks!



7 Marks of the marten

As the trail descends, the view up and along the slope gets bigger, and takes in cliffs and burn gulleys high above. This can be a good area to appreciate the rowan trees that grow here, especially in autumn.

Rowan leaves can be strongly tinted by early frosts. Their berries are popular with birds, especially migrant thrushes, and with pine martens. Beinn Eighe's mix of trees and wildlife is ideal for this nocturnal predator. It can turn a paw to many things for food, but has a soft spot for berries. You probably won't see a pine marten here (or one of the local Scottish wildcats, for that matter). But you might find one of its berry-laden droppings on the trail.



8 Dead impressive

The dead pine, twined with ivy, and the wildly branching birch nearby, give a sense of the woody energy of this place. Living trees are crucial to the forest, of course. But dead trees also play a part.

Birds such as great spotted woodpeckers and tits can use a dead trunk for nest holes. Plants can sprout from it and insects feed inside it. Scots pines can live for more than 700 years, stand dead then lie in slow decay for centuries more. So some young pines growing here today could still be here, in one form, a thousand years from now.



9 A different community

The burn to the left of the trail is Allt na Torach (Burn of the Fertile Place). The name shows how, for generations, local people have noticed the contrasts between the upper and lower parts of the wood.

Birch trees are more common here than upslope, as are rowans and alders. The vegetation on the woodland floor is more lush than under the pines you saw earlier. Spring flowers such as wood anemone, primrose and bluebell can bloom here before leaves on the trees above have fully opened to shade them. This greenery is boosted by water that comes from the soft rocks of the Fucoid Beds, rich in fossils and nutrients, higher up the hill.

Birds can be more numerous in this section of the wood too, including wren, chaffinch and several species of tits. Come autumn, the birch leaves fall, bright as yellow coins, on the grey path.



10 Temperate rainforest

A meeting of waters is often a good place to pause. Find a boulder or stump to sit on and let the beauty of this spot soak in. Across the twin burn channels, birch trunks are cloaked in green. Mosses and lichens are their mantle, a token of how moist the air is here from both burn splash and rainfall.

These, and the ferns that sprout from tree stems, are pointers to how native woods in the wetter west of Scotland are different from the drier forests of the east. Those in the west have many more moisture-loving plants, such as mosses, to soften their tree shapes. It's a gentle bonus from the sometimes heavy rains.



11 Brilliance in the bog

Continuing past more birches, alders and rowans, you come to a broad expanse of bog to the left of the trail. Look carefully and you could see several different kinds of Sphagnum bog moss. Each has a keynote colour, whether wine-red, buff or green.

Pressed together over centuries and more, these mosses are the raw material for peat. They form a living skin at the bog surface and hold tiny life forms within their cells. More obvious creatures are the dragonflies (some scarce, such as the northern emerald) that patrol Beinn Eighe's bogs.

As you return to the footbridge, you might hear the click and whirr of dragonfly wings in summer. At other times, just savour the water sounds as the burn leads you back to the lochside to complete the journey.





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- take responsibility for your own actions
- respect the interests of other people
- care for the environment.



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BEFORE YOU GO**

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Text: Kenny Taylor. Photography: all images by Lorne Gill/
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p6, p7, p9 (John MacPherson/NatureScot); p8, p14 (Mark
Hamblin).

ISBN: 978-1-85397-571-4 Print Code: ???K1220

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