

The Ardess

Hidden History Trail ... at Ben Lomond



Description: At first glance, Ben Lomond appears a wild, natural place, but for hundreds of years people have worked this land and altered it in the process. All across the lower slopes bracken hides the remains of stone walls and earth banks, some of which you can discover along this trail; these are ruins of buildings and field-dykes, reminders of an active community of farming families living around the mountain up to the 19th century.

Grade: Easy/Moderate

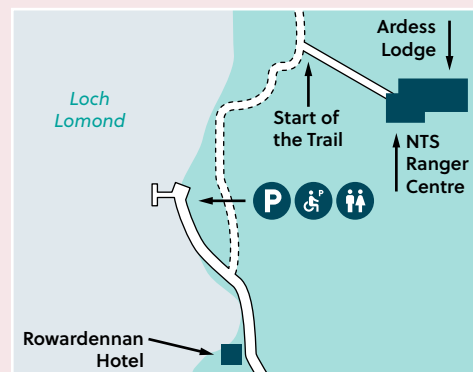
Terrain: The path is unsurfaced and unsuitable for wheeled access; care should be taken on steeper sections.

Distance: 1.5 km

Time: 40 minutes minimum

OS Map: Landranger Sheet 56

Facilities: Parking, toilets, dogs welcome on lead.



A busy community

By the 18th century there were over forty households living along the foot of the west side of Ben Lomond, including eight in the Ardess area. They grew crops and grazed cattle, goats, and sheep. In the summer months younger family members took the animals up to higher pastures and lived in shielings (small seasonal stone and turf buildings). Here they kept the animals from straying and prepared dairy products. As autumn

approached harvests were gathered, and the livestock brought down again for the annual cattle markets in Falkirk and Stirling.

In the fields

Miles of stone and turf dykes (walls) marked land divisions and prevented animals from grazing on the crops. 'Rig and furrow' was the common form of cultivation from the 16th to 19th centuries. The rigs were long ridges of built-up earth, cattle dung

and other organic material, which provided fertile soil for growing crops such as oats and barley. They were interspersed with furrows, or channels, to improve drainage. In order to ensure a fair division of arable land, tenants drew lots each year to decide which rigs they would cultivate.

Forgotten past

About 250 years ago, extensive sheep grazing and sporting interests began to replace rig and furrow cultivation as landowners looked to raise more profit from their lands. As small-scale farming was pushed out, families moved away to cities or emigrated from Scotland. By the early 19th century most of the buildings on the trail were abandoned and an older way of life disappeared.

Most of the surviving placenames are Gaelic, the dominant language of the area until the early 19th century. Ardess is from the words ard (high) and eas (waterfall) referring to the prominent waterfall on the slopes above.



The Ardess

Hidden History Trail ... at Ben Lomond



1 Cruck Frame building: A reconstructed example of how buildings in the area may have looked in the past built in 2012 to 2015 with volunteer help. The timber frame supported the roof from the ground, and the walls were made from turf and earth on a stone base.



2 Oak Woodlands and Industry: The Oak are around 200 years old and were planted as a source of tannins, extracted from the bark and used in the leather industry. Trees such as Hazel, Holly, Rowan, and other species are returning to create a more diverse, natural woodland for the wildlife that lives here.



3 The House by the Water: The stone base of a building can be seen at the foot of the slope below the trail. An archaeological dig carried out in 2022 found an old flat iron and pottery dating back to the mid-1600's.



4 Where Crops were Grown: The raised ridges of rig and furrow can faintly be seen on this area of more level ground. The use of this area for growing crops pre-dates the planting of the oak woodland.



5 Rig and Furrow: The distinct profile of rig and furrow has survived better in this more open area. The surrounding ground is naturally wet, so a lot of work went into creating these ridges where crops could successfully be grown.



6 The Head Dyke: The head dyke was a key part of the old farming system. The livestock were put out beyond it when the spring came, so that crops could be grown in the low ground below. It had a vertical uphill face to stop livestock getting back through it.



The Ardess

Hidden History Trail ... at Ben Lomond



7 Iron Smelting: The stones in the middle of the site are where a clay furnace stood, in which iron ore was heated to very high temperatures using charcoal. A large area of slag next to the furnace site is nearly 1m deep showing a lot of use of this site. It was most likely being used in the 16th and 17th centuries. A building on the next rise may have been used as a store for this activity, and there are pits nearby which may have been used to turn locally cut wood into charcoal for use in the furnace.



8 Working platform: This stone revetment bank is a bit of a mystery. It was used to create a level platform for some purpose. One possibility is it was a bark drying platform associated with the 19th century oak coppicing.



9 Mud and Thatch: This smaller version of a cruck-frame building was built without a stone base and is surprisingly recent for such a primitive structure, dating to the mid-1800's. It has even been possible to identify the people who lived in it from census records, Robert and Catherine Clark. Robert worked as a woodcutter at the time.



10 Tigh an Eas: This house may have still been lived in during the early 1800's and is the only building on the trail that is named on early OS maps. The name means house by the waterfall. The thick stone wall bases suggest it had stone rather than turf walls, and the stone may have been robbed to build a sheep fank 100m further up the hill.



11 Ruskenach: On modern maps the name of this settlement has survived as Rowchnock but has been corrupted over time. There were four households in this settlement in the 1700's which included the two previous buildings and the outbuilding footings here. Rob Roy MacGregor was the owner of Ruskenach and Ardess from 1711 to 1713.

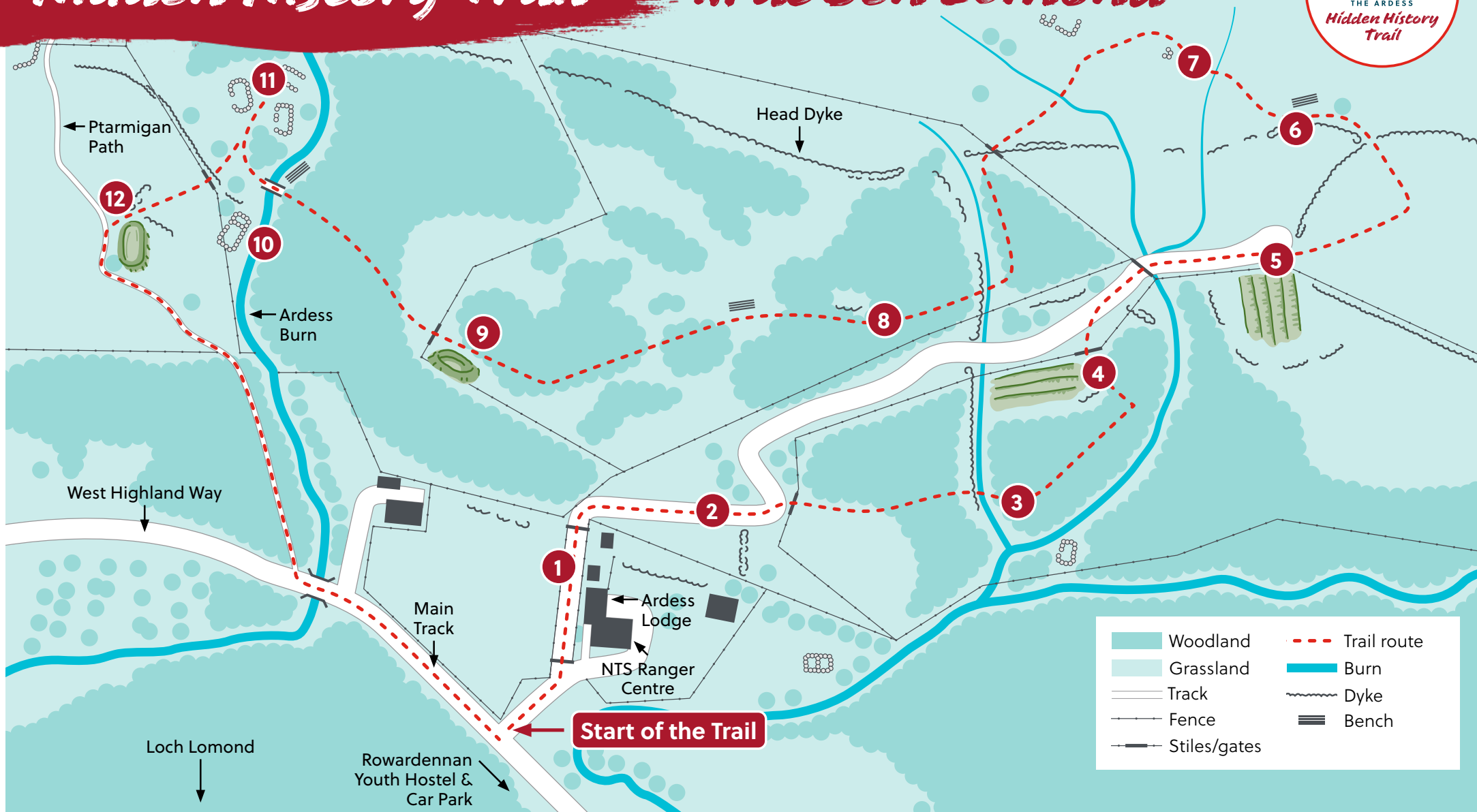


12 The Longhouse: This looks to be a typical example of a longhouse, a common building with two compartments, separating the family living quarters and the cattle byre. It was also part of the Ruskenach settlement.



The Ardess

Hidden History Trail ... at Ben Lomond



Contact us by phone: **01360 870224**, email: **benlomond@nts.org.uk**, or find us on Facebook @ **Ben Lomond Ranger Service**
www.nts.org.uk