

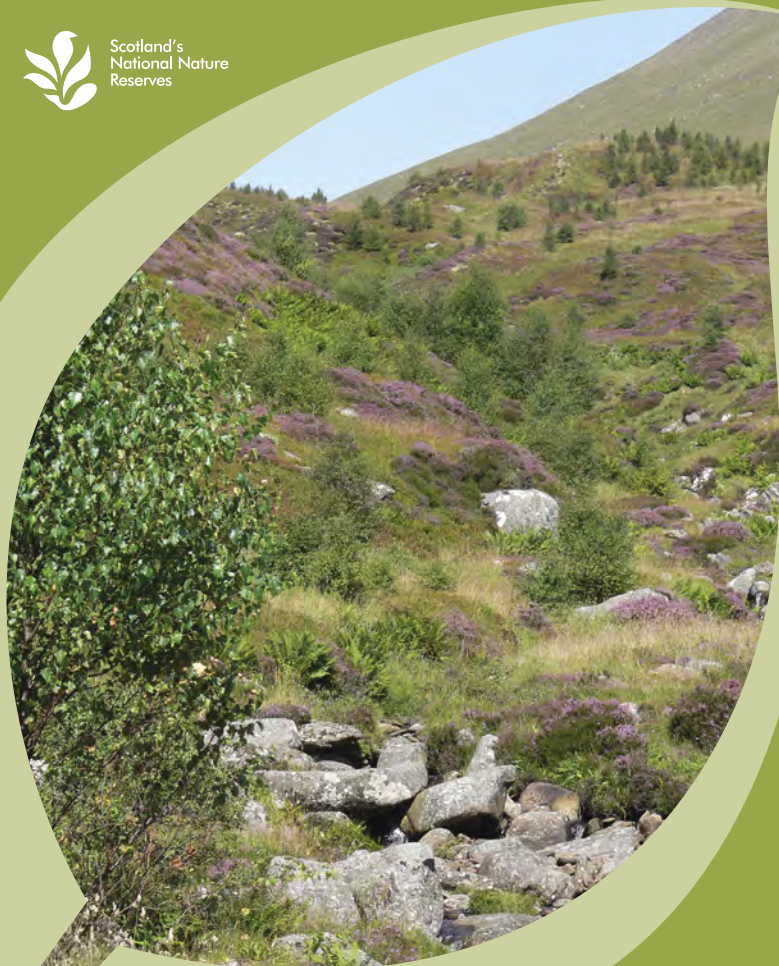
Ben Lawers National Nature Reserve



Edramucky Trail



Scotland's
National Nature
Reserves



Ben Lawers National Nature Reserve

Ben Lawers (1214m; 3984ft) is the highest mountain in Tayside and gives its name to a whole National Nature Reserve encompassing the summits and southern slopes of the Ben Lawers and most of the Tarmachan range. The area, famous for its flora, is owned and managed for conservation and access by the National Trust for Scotland.

The Trust Rangers offer a programme of guided walks and events during the summer months. For more information on these or the Reserve itself visit:
www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/ben-lawers

There is something for everyone on the Edramucky Trail. Families and visitors of all ages can follow the trail of Ed the Edramucky Puss Moth Caterpillar as he munches his way around the path, and goes on a journey of his own.



“ Hi, I’m Ed! I’m very hungry, but I will tell you about my home on the hill. So follow my trail... ”

Edramucky Trail

- On the Edramucky Trail you can enjoy some of the flowers and wildlife which inhabit the lower slopes of the mountain, including restored natural plant communities, and see remnants of past land use
- The trail is a 1.75km (1 mile) loop with an ascent of 110m (360ft) close to the Edramucky Burn. If you take the additional walk to the shielings on the lip of Coire Odhar the total distance is 3.25km (2 miles) with an ascent of 200m (660ft)
- The numbers in this booklet each refer to a marked point on the trail
- Allow about 1½ hours to walk the basic route to give you time to explore the features described
- The ground is uneven so we recommend sturdy footwear
- Vegetation is easily damaged by repeated trampling, so please keep to the path as far as possible. Also, please leave the plants for others to enjoy; you may be committing an offence if you pick them
- Remember the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. Respect other people's privacy and their need for enjoyment. Keep dogs under control and treat Ben Lawers with care, leaving it undisturbed and free from litter.

1 Beautiful bog

The raised path and boardwalk were built to protect the soft, boggy areas from being trampled. Here the soil is waterlogged most of the time and so the remains of dead plants don't fully decompose, but accumulate to form peat. This acid soil has only small quantities of nutrients available for plants, so any growing here need special characteristics to thrive. Growing among the sedges and rushes are aptly named plants such as bog moss, bog asphodel, bog heather (or cross-leaved heath), bog cotton (or cotton grass), marsh willowherb and marsh arrowgrass.

You may see and hear meadow pipit and skylark, both brown-streaked summer visitors and most easily distinguished by their characteristic songs. The meadow pipit utters its twittering glissando as it parachutes to the ground, while the sustained warble of the skylark is sung from on high – a real sound of summer.

“ This is a very boggy place and quite far from my home, on the other side of the fence. But some things do live and thrive in this bog. Can you see an oily surface on the water? It's not pollution, but shows that tiny creatures live in the peaty water. ”





Bog asphodel

2 The return of the woodland

We built this fence in 1990 to prevent animals grazing and to allow a range of plants that once thrived here to recover. You can now see a big contrast between the vegetation inside and outside the fence. Over centuries, the native trees, shrubs and flowering plants have been replaced by the grassland you can see over most of the hill today. With local farmers holding grazing rights on the Trust hill ground, fencing off small areas is the only way of removing grazing to allow regeneration.

Between the trees, tall grasses and flowers such as lady's smock, heath bedstraw, tormentil and devil's-bit scabious are visible during the spring and summer months. Insect-eating birds like whinchat and stonechat quickly re-colonised the developing woodland and the lovely descending song of the willow warbler is now a common sound. The maturing trees also provide food for seed-eating species such as redpoll.



“ Listen ... if it is spring or summer you may hear birdsong. Now the woods have come back, the birds love it here. There are plenty of insects like me to gobble up! If one comes near, I waggle my red tails to scare them off! ”





3 Flushed with colour

As you approach the Edramucky Burn the vegetation becomes more varied. Here the nutrient-rich bedrock has been exposed by the eroding action of the flowing burn. Minerals are steadily dissolved into the water passing over its surface, enriching the surrounding soil with nutrients. This process of mineral enrichment is called 'flushing' and provides ideal conditions for many plants.

Some local and colourful mountain plants are visible among the rocks, especially at the edge of the burn. Look out for purple saxifrage (April), moss campion, with pink flowers on compact green cushions (May), and yellow mountain saxifrage, with narrow succulent leaves (July).

On the steep slopes within this sheltered ravine, mountain (or lemon-scented) fern is conspicuous. Try crushing a small piece of the frond to release the lemon scent.

“ Blaeberrries grow here in the summer. Pretty pink flowers turn into juicy purple berries. Try some. Wildlife and people seem to like them. I prefer woody willow, yum... ”





Blaeberry

4

Montane match-making

Among the boulders in the burn is a mountain willow, one of several species native to the area. Even with grazing removed, willows were unlikely to regenerate naturally as the separate male and female plants must be reasonably close together to produce seed. So, we planted seedlings grown from locally collected seed in our tree nursery around surviving bushes like this one to create seed-producing populations and kick-start natural regeneration.

Insects and other invertebrates thrive in these developing habitats and provide food for birds. Moths are abundant and several species, such as emperor and northern eggar moths, are day flyers. Others, like the puss moth, are less easily seen and some only by harmless light trapping. The rare cousin german moth was recorded this way.

“ This is my home, among the willow. There’s plenty to eat, so lots of us live here. See if you can spy a caterpillar or moth! It’s tough, because we’re shy and our colours help us hide among the leaves or heathers. While we’re here, I’ll just eat a bit more... ”





Juniper



Emperor moth caterpillar

5 Butterfly banquet

Tall herbs are another important habitat that regenerates naturally here. A rich mix of broad-leaved plants now thrive, like the purple-flowered wood cranesbill, water avens, wild angelica and globeflower. Plants previously restricted to niches between the rocks, including marsh hawk's-beard and goldenrod, are now more widespread.

Look out for butterflies feeding on the many flowers around the trail. On sunny days you might spot green-veined white, small heath, small pearl-bordered and dark green fritillaries depending on the time of year. In July you may be lucky enough to see the mountain ringlet, which is local to this area, distinguished by its dark, chocolate-brown colour.

Mosses are an important and profuse component of the mountain vegetation, particularly where it is damp. The one you are most likely to encounter is the star-shaped common haircap moss, which often forms large clumps.

“ When I grow up, I’ll become a moth. My cousins, butterflies, love it here with all the tasty flowers. Look for the pink flowers of wild thyme, growing in big mats beside the path. It smells nice if you crush it between your fingers. ”





Wild thyme

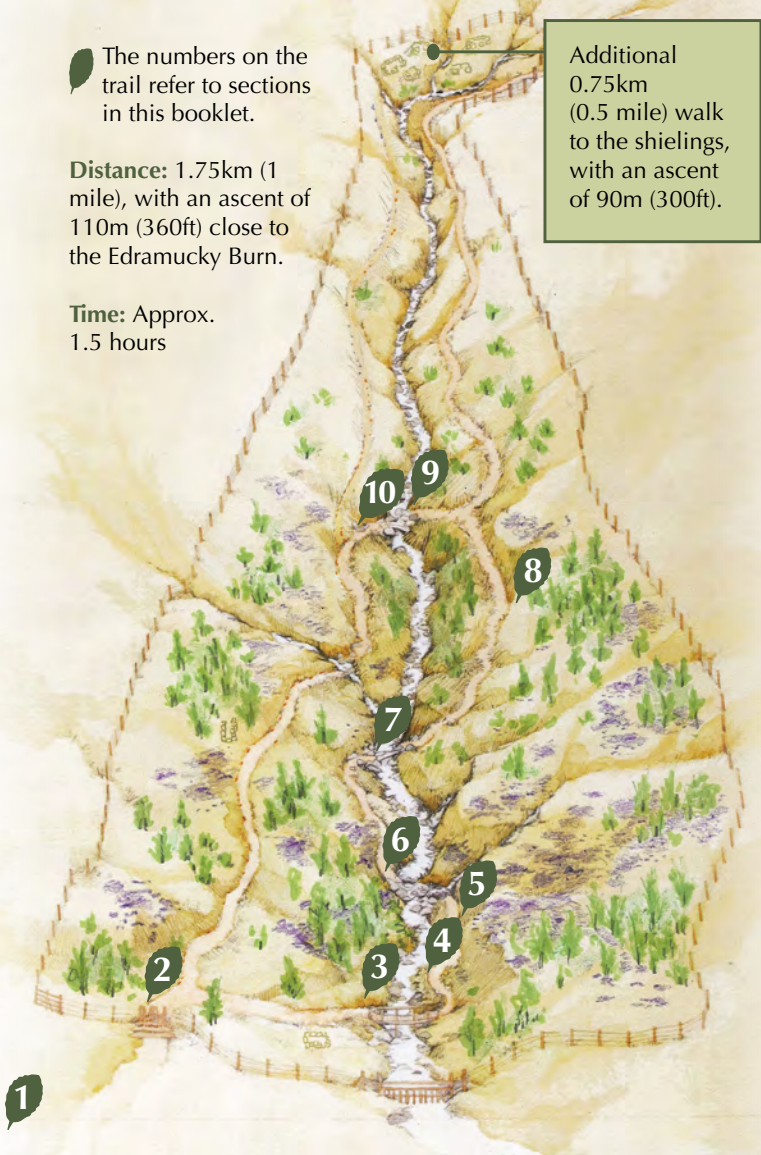
Edramucky Trail

The numbers on the trail refer to sections in this booklet.

Distance: 1.75km (1 mile), with an ascent of 110m (360ft) close to the Edramucky Burn.

Time: Approx. 1.5 hours

Additional 0.75km (0.5 mile) walk to the shielings, with an ascent of 90m (300ft).



6 Midgie munchers

Look out for butterwort and sundew to the left of the boardwalk. Both show an interesting adaptation to living in bogs where nitrogen is not readily available: they catch insects on their sticky leaves before digesting them slowly as a source of nitrogen-rich food. Please do not step off the boardwalk, as even a few footsteps can cause irreparable damage.

Another interesting plant seen here is lousewort. This small pink plant is semi-parasitic, manufacturing its own food but also attaching its roots to those of surrounding plants and stealing nutrients from them. Within the steep gorge, ledges provide shelter and shade similar to that found in woodland, and several woodland plants occur here. These include wood anemone, primrose, greater woodrush and male fern.



Butterwort



“ On warm days, if you are quiet, you may see a common lizard sun-bathig on the wood or rocks. I don't trust these reptiles, they might try to eat me for lunch! ”



7

Boulders and water beasties

The rock exposed on the bed of the burn here is mica-schist. The flakes of mica give the rocks a shiny appearance. This was originally formed in layers that were folded by great pressures within the Earth's crust. The waterfalls here were formed as the burn eroded the softer rock, leaving the harder layers exposed.

The burn and its surrounding pools are home to aquatic animals, including many insects, such as skaters, frogs and occasionally palmate newts. As you cross the ford you may see tadpoles. See if you can spot any that are growing legs; many of our tadpoles are very big by the autumn, but take two years to develop into frogs. Many insect larvae, like those of mayflies and caddis flies, also live in the water and provide food for dippers. In fine weather, dragonflies patrol up and down close to the burn, looking for insect prey.



Tadpoles



“ Shiny, shiny ... Can you spot the red, twelve-sided garnet crystals, jutting out from the boulders here? Run your hands over the rough surface. They are tougher than the other rocks and very old. ”



8 High points on the horizon

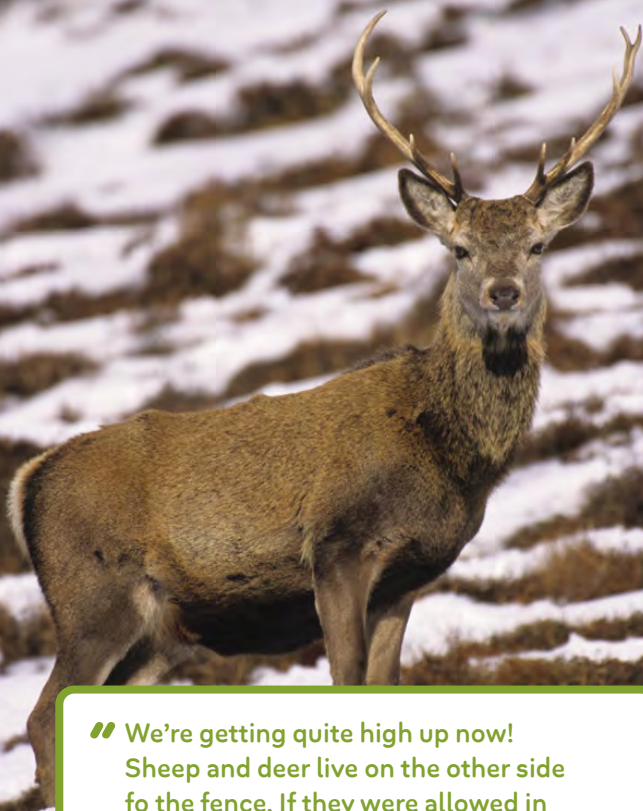
As you look back down the hill you can see developing woodland around the car park. This is part of larger-scale habitat restoration on the slopes of Meall nan Tarmachan, made possible by the absence of grazing rights.

Over Loch Tay, on a good day, you will see Ben Vorlich and Stuc a Chroin and, to the west, Stob Binnien and Ben More. Looking uphill flanking Coire Odhar, on the left is Meall Corranaich and the right Beinn Ghlas, two of the six Munros owned by the Trust within the Ben Lawers range. We built the zigzag path ascending the south-west ridge of Beinn Ghlas to control the erosion resulting from the pressure caused by thousands of walkers on this popular route.

A very common bird on the hillside is the raven, often seen performing its aerial acrobatics or given away by its throaty call.



Raven



“ We’re getting quite high up now! Sheep and deer live on the other side of the fence. If they were allowed in here, they’d eat all our food. Yikes, I’m turning purple! I’d better start making my home for the winter... ”



9 Creeping up, flowing down

The steep bank on your right has many species of low-growing and creeping plants on it because the soil is well drained and unstable. Part of the instability results from a natural process known as solifluction. During a thaw from severe winter conditions, the ground may remain frozen at depth, while the surface layer thaws to become wet and heavy. The top layer then slumps slightly, causing terracing.

Two unusual non-flowering plants are the alpine and stag's-horn clubmosses. The upright, fertile shoots of the stag's-horn clubmoss resemble the antlers of deer and can be seen protruding from the surrounding vegetation.

The burn here may have little or no water flowing in it. This is because of the small dam upstream, which diverts the water through a tunnel into the enlarged Lochan na Lairige about a mile north of the Reserve car park. The water is taken by pipeline to Finlarig Power Station near Killin where, on its final steep fall to Loch Tay, the energy of the rushing water is used to generate electricity.



“ Don't mind me, I'm just weaving my cocoon... Some of the rocks here have a colourful coat of lichens growing on them. How many different colours can you see? Yawn, I'm tired... ”



10 Walking into the past

Alongside the main path below you is an old trackway used to herd cattle from the farmsteads beside the loch to the summer grazing higher up the hillside. Local people tending the cattle once lived in small huts known as shielings, a practice known as transhumance.

If you follow this track north it leads to a cluster of ruined shielings in Coire Odhar. These appear as tumble-down oval or rectangular stone structures which would have been thatched with heather. Within them you can make out features such as doorways and wall cupboards.

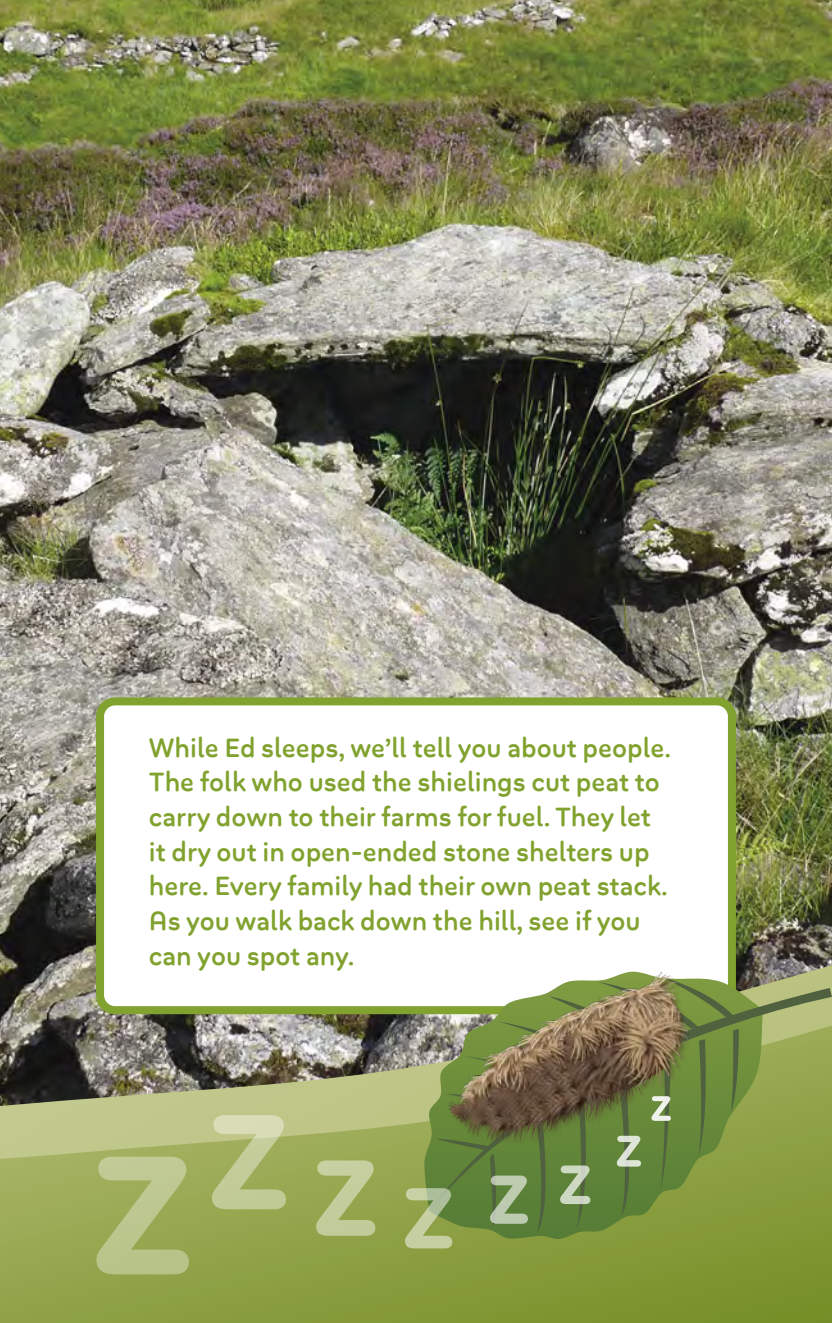
Excavation of some of these structures found evidence of occupation from the 14th–17th century AD. Close by, charcoal and prehistoric flint and quartz artefacts indicated hunter-gatherers had camped here over 9,000 years ago, making this one of the highest dated sites of early human activity in Scotland.

If you decide to walk to the shielings, please note that you will then be at a height of 630m (2,070ft). It is inadvisable to go above there unless you are equipped and experienced for mountain walking.

To return from here, descend south along the main path below post 10.



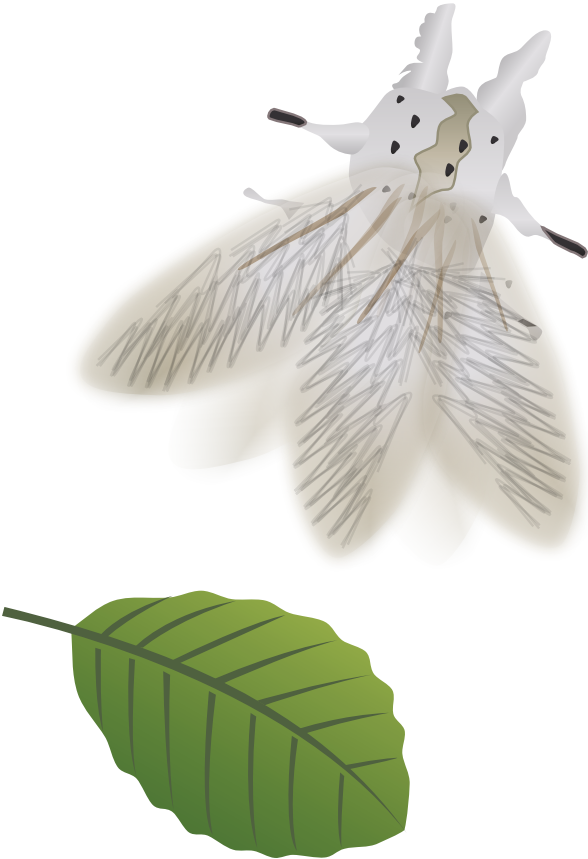
*Wall cupboard
in shieling hut*



While Ed sleeps, we'll tell you about people. The folk who used the shielings cut peat to carry down to their farms for fuel. They let it dry out in open-ended stone shelters up here. Every family had their own peat stack. As you walk back down the hill, see if you can spot any.



Ed the Puss Moth Caterpillar has finished his journey and leaves his cocoon as an adult Puss Moth. His cat-like look gives him his name. He's flying off now to find a dark, hidden spot. We hope you enjoyed his trail.





The National Trust for Scotland

The National Trust for Scotland is an independent charity with the aim of conserving, managing and promoting Scotland's cultural and natural heritage.

We depend on our members and visitors to enable us to continue our work, both now and in the future. Please support us in achieving this aim; join the Trust at Ben Lawers and contribute directly to the management work on the Reserve, or join online at www.nts.org.uk

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Photography supplied by Mike Bolam,
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