

EXPLORE THE IRON AGE OF LOCH TAY & LOCH TUMMEL



Explorer Guide 2

Highland Perthshire is full of exciting and dramatic landscapes steeped in history - and none more so than the mountains and glens around Loch Rannoch, Loch Tummel and Loch Tay. Here you can find once mighty hillforts, still commanding fine views over their ancient dominions. Explore further and you can find evidence of many smaller ringforts, duns and crannogs, the fortified homesteads of Iron Age farmers and their kin.

The Iron Age in Scotland begins around 700 BC and spans over one thousand years of history. It includes the centuries of Roman military activity (from the advance of Agricola in the AD 70s to the campaign of Severus between AD208 and 210) and ends with the emergence of the early historic kingdoms of the Picts and Scots.

At the end of the Bronze Age (which spanned the second millennium BC) there was serious climatic deterioration and the weather became colder and wetter. The resulting pressure on land and resources led to the construction of new types of defensive structures in the Iron Age. Hillforts, duns and monumental roundhouses were built - and it was also an important time for the loch-dwellings known as crannogs.

This leaflet is your guide to the Iron Age of Highland Perthshire: leading you to fantastic key sites and providing an introduction to our one thousand year story on the edge of the Roman Empire...



Front Cover: the Queen's View ringfort, overlooking Loch Tummel (photography: Eddie Martin © Forestry Commission Scotland).

Above: How the site may have looked around 100 BC (artist: Chris Mitchell © Perth and Kinross Countryside Trust).

Enjoy Scotland's outdoors responsibly

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

- Crannogs are loch-dwellings found throughout Scotland and Ireland, often dating from the Iron Age.
- An important part of our heritage, crannogs were built in lochs as defended homesteads that represented symbols of power and wealth.
- The crannog dwellers were farmers who grew wheat, barley and flax and kept cattle, sheep and goats. They also hunted deer and wild boar and gathered wild plants, nuts and berries from the woodlands and mountains.
- While there are hundreds of crannogs in Scotland and Ireland, most survive only as submerged mounds or are visible only as small islands.
- The Scottish Crannog Centre features a unique and authentic reconstruction of an early Iron Age loch-dwelling, based on the underwater excavation of the nearby 2,500 year old 'Oakbank Crannog'.
- A visit to this award-winning Centre includes indoor and outdoor exhibits, a guided crannog tour and many 'hands-on' ancient crafts and technology demonstrations. Regular special events feature prehistoric cooking, textiles, metalworking and woodworking. Weather permitting you can even hire one of our replica dugout canoes!
- It is an excellent day out for adults and children alike, from ages 4+.



HOW TO GET THERE

- 📍 The Scottish Crannog Centre (NN 770 448) is on the south side of Loch Tay at Kenmore and is clearly marked by road signs.

For more information:

- ☎ 01887 830583
- ✉ info@crannog.co.uk
- 🌐 www.crannog.co.uk

- Surprisingly few hillforts were built in Highland Perthshire. Caisteal Mac Tuathal is an exception, dramatically overlooking the River Tay in the Appin of Dull. The hillfort is said to be connected to Tuathal, the Abbot of Dunkeld in the 9th century AD.
- The Annals of Ulster record that "Tuathal son of Artgus, chief bishop of Fortriu [Pictland] and Abbot of Dunkeld [died]" in AD 865.
- Abbots in the early Christian church were often also powerful landlords, similar to the Pictish nobility.
- Although unexcavated, we can compare Caisteal Mac Tuathal with other early historic Pictish forts, which were both defensive and symbolic. As centres of power and prestige, they were usually located to control important trade or communication routes - and archaeological excavation has shown some were also centres of prestigious metalworking.



Above: a Pictish seat of power (artist: Chris Mitchell © Forestry Commission Scotland)
Below: the site today...



HOW TO GET THERE

- 📍 The fort is managed by Forestry Commission Scotland. Use the Drummond Hill carparks on the road between Kenmore and Keltneyburn (NN 772 460 or NN 788 478) and follow the Forest paths to the hill-fort NN 778 476.



- Ringforts are a type of monumental roundhouse to be found mainly in this area. There are around seventy examples of ringforts in the area, found along Glen Lyon, Upper Strath Tay, Strath Braan, Loch Tay, Loch Tummel and around Pitlochry.
- They were first noted by Thomas Pennant in his Tour in Scotland (1776) in which he quotes a Gaelic poem referring to a group of ancient 'castles' in Glen Lyon: "twelve castles had Fionn in the dark, bent glen of the stones". The sites often have the Gaelic place-name 'caisteal' or 'bail' meaning castle, and several are known as 'Caisteal Dubh' (the Black Castle).



- The archaeologist Dr. Margaret Stewart was the first to properly excavate a ringfort. At Litigan she discovered a central hearth and a circular arrangement of postholes inside the enclosure wall (suggesting a substantial timber-built conical thatched roof). At Queen's View excavation revealed evidence of iron-working, alongside stone artefacts such as rotary querns, a stone cup, a yellow translucent bead and a stone lamp.



Above: This amber-coloured bead from the Queen's View was one of the few objects not made of stone, wood or leather (Courtesy of Perth Museum & Art Gallery, Perth & Kinross Council).

Left: Life inside a crannog or roundhouse would have focused on a central hearth for cooking and heating (artist: Alan Braby).

HOW TO GET THERE

- The ringfort is managed by Forestry Commission Scotland. Park at the Allean Forest Car Park, Loch Tummel (NN 858 599), around 500m west of the Queen's View Visitor Centre. Follow the route on the boards at the car park.



1: The Black Spout wood, Pitlochry

Use the car park at the east of Pitlochry (NN 950 575) and follow the footpath to the dramatic waterfall. Walk back along the burn and look for the remains of the ringfort (NN 952 576). Recent excavations uncovered a ringfort similar to Queen's View, occupied in the later Iron Age and producing similar stone querns, loom weights and a glass toggle. The building had a massive stone façade to impress visitors.

2: Glen Lyon, West of Fortingall

Explore the series of ringforts along the valley floor of this dramatic and remote glen, particularly those built between Pubil and Cashlie (NN 479 416). Remember, "twelve castles had Finn in the dark, bent glen of the stones". The Gaelic names of the ringforts refer to characters in the legends of Finn MacCoul.



Reconstruction of Borenich by artist David Simon © Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust.

3: An Dun Geal, Fortingall

In the hills above Fortingall is a well preserved ringfort (NN 747 475). An Dun Gael (the White Fort) occupies a strongly defended position overlooking the ancient and historic village. There are also remains of a hillfort nearby (NN 751 477).

4: The Dun, Dun Hill, Aberfeldy

A small hillfort can be found within the forest, with tumbled stone walls and multiple enclosing ditches (NN 863 475).

5: Caisteal Dubh, Balnaguard

A much reduced hillfort in the uplands above Strath Tay with spectacular views. A modern sheep fold within has been built from the stones of the fort (NN 929 513).

6: Borenich, Loch Tummel

Around a mile west of the Queens View, this well preserved ringfort, sits on the edge of Loch Tummel, although the loch level was much lower in the Iron Age (NN 845 600).



Borenich as it is today, photo by Eddie Martin © Forestry Commission Scotland

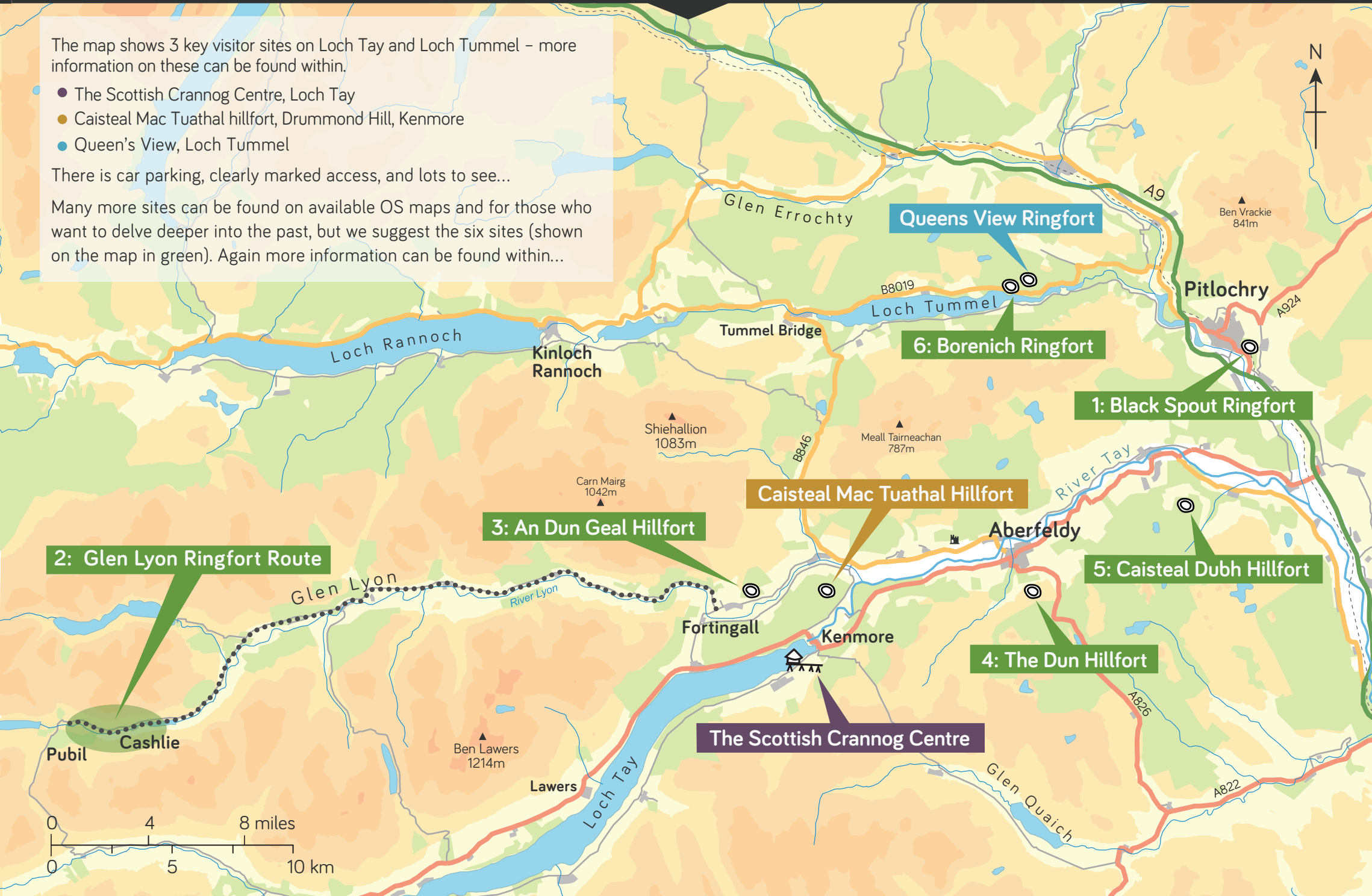
EXPLORE

The map shows 3 key visitor sites on Loch Tay and Loch Tummel - more information on these can be found within.

- The Scottish Crannog Centre, Loch Tay
- Caisteal Mac Tuathal hillfort, Drummond Hill, Kenmore
- Queen's View, Loch Tummel

There is car parking, clearly marked access, and lots to see...

Many more sites can be found on available OS maps and for those who want to delve deeper into the past, but we suggest the six sites (shown on the map in green). Again more information can be found within...



2: Glen Lyon Ringfort Route

3: An Dun Geal Hillfort

Caisteal Mac Tuathal Hillfort

1: Black Spout Ringfort

6: Borenich Ringfort

Queens View Ringfort

5: Caisteal Dubh Hillfort

4: The Dun Hillfort

The Scottish Crannog Centre