

Discover Barnluasgan Important Plant Area

Where lochside meets temperate rainforest

This hilly walk takes you through an ancient woodland of oak, hazel and birch, home to a rich diversity of unique miniature plants that cover branches, trees and boulders. It is these lichens, mosses and liverworts that make Scotland's rainforest internationally important.

Where to start

Start from the Loch Barnluasgan Forestry and Land Scotland car park, just off the B8025 between Bellanoch and Tayvallich (grid reference NR 790 910).

Distance

1½ miles, allow 1–1½ hours.

Walk grade

Following Forestry and Land Scotland's 'Oakwood' trail, this is a strenuous circular walk on narrow gravel paths with steep sections of rocky steps, including two gates. Sturdy footwear is essential.

Refreshments

Crinan, which is the nearest village for places to eat and drink, is three miles away.

WC

The nearest lavatories are in Crinan.



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©Plantlife December 2021

ISBN: 978-1-910212-37-0

Cover photograph: ©Bill Baillie

Printed by Acanthus Press, Somerset

Design: evansgraphic.co.uk



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Thank you

Barnluasgan is managed by Forest Enterprise Scotland and we would like to thank them for their advice and support in producing this guide. Funding was provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Scottish Natural Heritage.



Alliance for
Scotland's
Rainforest



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Plantlife Wild flower walks



The wild plants of Barnluasgan

A 1½ mile walk through Scotland's
Rainforest – part of the West
Coast Important Plant Area



Discover Barnluasgan

Important Plant Area

Directions

- 1 Leave the car park and head down to the lochside. Take the gravel path to the right, keeping the loch on your left-hand side. To your right, you will pass a steep, large boulder-strewn hillside. As you look left through the trees to the shallow loch edges beyond, look out for the frothy pink-white flowers of **bogbean**.
- 2 Continue on the flat gravel path along the lochside. Then take the next way marked 'Path' on the right, up steps into a stand of birch and rowan. The path weaves its way steeply uphill for some way, passing by more hazel with profusions of big 'leafy' lichens – a good sign of clean air quality. As you near the top of the hill, it opens out to a clearing with bracken. Dipping down over the other side, you'll come to an area of mature sessile oak. Look into the branches of the closest oak tree to the path on the right-hand side – it is festooned with the lichen, **tree lungwort**, and the dainty fern, **common polypody**.
- 3 After this, the path swings left along a ridge or 'knap' between Barnluasgan and Loch Linne. The oak trees continue along this ridge and if you look for a tree to the right of the path with a dead tree below, you may discover a mat of the diminutive **Wilson's filmy fern**.
- 4 Continue along the ridge which starts to dip downhill. A sharper descent takes you into a birch area with hazel and bluebells in spring, then finally down steps to a boggy area with a small stream passing under the path. As the path starts to climb again, notice how the woodland has now changed to mainly birch, rowan and willow. Continue as the path becomes a little flatter, then when you reach a sharp corner that swings left, look at the boulder area to the right of the path. Take a moment to discover the small bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) that live here, especially **western earwort**.
- 5 The path now continues flatter for a while, then twists to the right and slightly uphill, passing through birch, willow and the odd oak tree, all covered with 'shrubby' lichens. These are attached to their substrate at one point

and then branch. Pass another small view off to the right with a turn to the left. Near this bend, look out for **honeysuckle** winding itself around the branches of trees in the canopy.

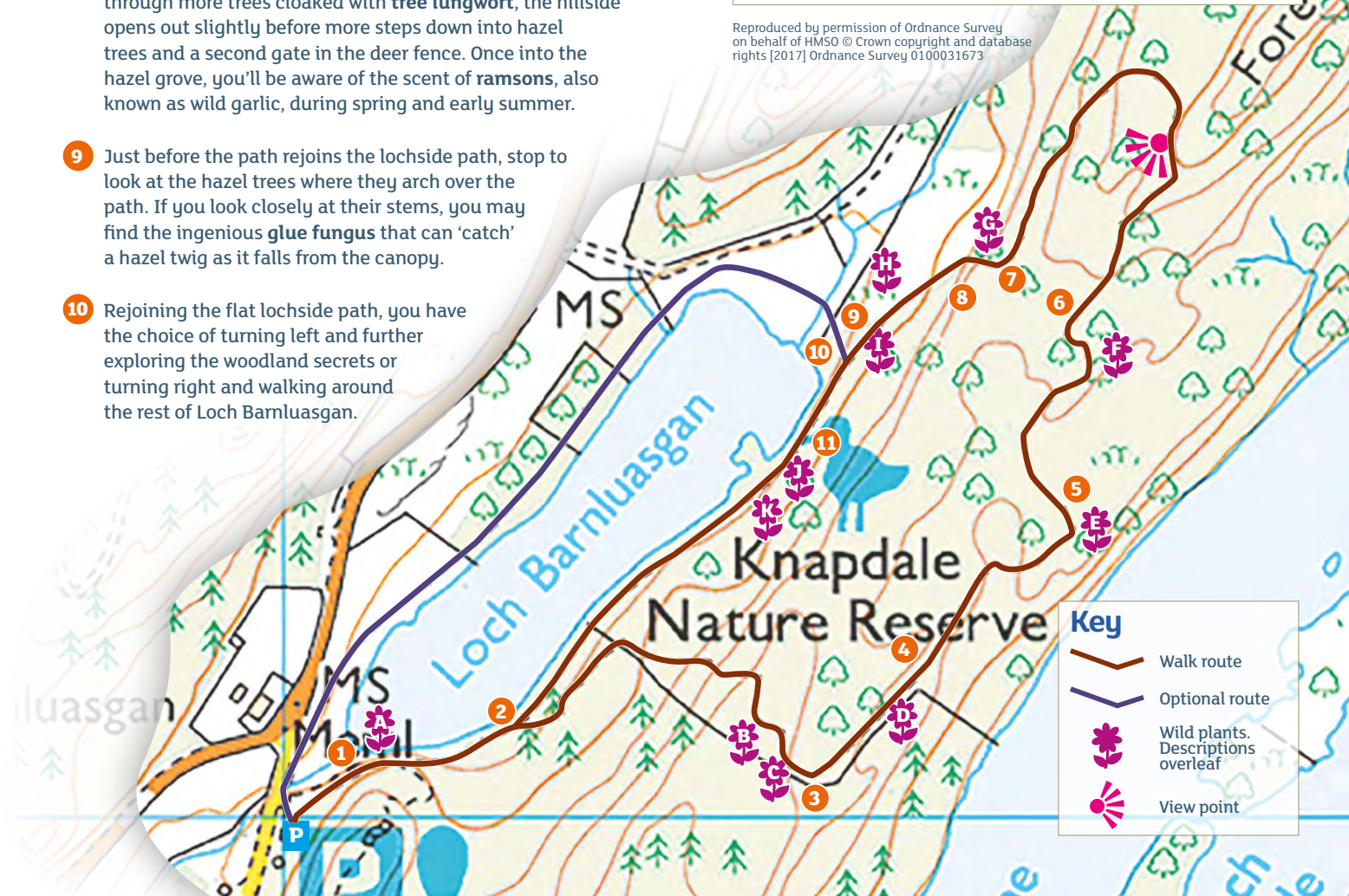
- 6 Carry on along the path, which starts a gradual climb and becomes steeper with a flight of steps leading to a stunning viewpoint across Loch Linne. The path then descends steeply, finally passing through a gate in a deer fence. Continue through more birch and hazel.
- 7 Before a sharp turn to the right and descent down stone steps, look out for a boulder outcrop on the right of the path. This is a good place to see the characteristic moss of Scotland's rainforest, **slender mouse-tail**, clinging to the boulders.
- 8 After descending the steep stone steps and passing through more trees cloaked with **tree lungwort**, the hillside opens out slightly before more steps down into hazel trees and a second gate in the deer fence. Once into the hazel grove, you'll be aware of the scent of **ramsons**, also known as wild garlic, during spring and early summer.
- 9 Just before the path rejoins the lochside path, stop to look at the hazel trees where they arch over the path. If you look closely at their stems, you may find the ingenious **glue fungus** that can 'catch' a hazel twig as it falls from the canopy.
- 10 Rejoining the flat lochside path, you have the choice of turning left and further exploring the woodland secrets or turning right and walking around the rest of Loch Barnluasgan.

- 11 This walk takes you left, back towards the car park with the loch now on your right-hand side. Stop to look at the boulders dotted along the left of the wooded path – many of these are covered with the aptly named **dog lichen**, a moderately large, grey 'leafy' lichen. Also keep an eye out for the bright green heart-shaped leaves of **wood sorrel** which nestles in the crook of tree trunks. Additionally, you may come face-to-face with the elusive **ghillie dhu** – he also likes to hang out among the moss-laden boulders and in the nooks and crannies of trees.

Important Plant Areas (IPAs)

Barnluasgan forms part of the West Coast IPA, which is internationally important for its lichens and bryophyte communities. This is one of the 47 IPAs in Scotland. IPAs are internationally recognised hotspots for wild plants and lichens. For more information and to discover other IPAs to visit go to www.plantlife.org.uk/scotland

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Plants of Barnluasgan

This woodland is a classic temperate rainforest of international importance, rich and diverse in plant and fungi species, as well as folklore. It includes:

Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*

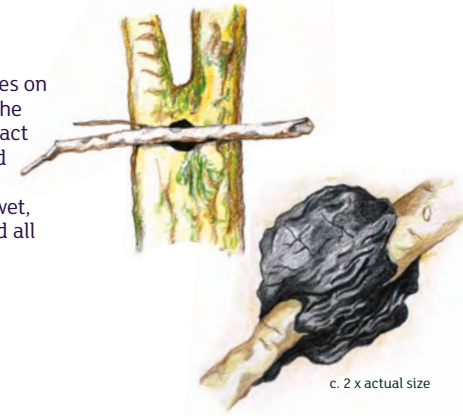
An attractive, floating aquatic plant with three upright oval-shaped leaflets ('trifoliate') and producing green bean-like fruits, which give the flower its common name. The pink-white flowers that form branching spikes appear between May and June.



c. 4 x actual size

Western earwort *Scapania gracilis*

One of the most common bryophytes on the boulder outcrop by the side of the footpath, this liverwort forms compact mats with small, individual rounded heads. It is a true oceanic resident of Scotland's rainforest, preferring wet, humid conditions, and can be found all year round.



c. 2 x actual size

Glue fungus *Hymenochaete corrugata*

This intriguing fungus is found on the living stems of hazel trees. To avoid competition from ground-dwelling fungi, it 'captures' its food (dead hazel twigs) before it hits the ground. The fungus is then able to feed off these twigs. Look for twigs that are suspended at a jaunty angle, as if in mid-air!



c. 4 x smaller than actual size

Tree lungwort *Lobaria pulmonaria*

Lichens are a combination of a fungus and an alga or bacteria and this large, 'leafy' lichen resembles green lungs, hence its common name. This species is a good indicator of ancient woodland. Look to see if you can find its orange-red fruiting bodies which produce spores.

Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*

When in flower, this plant is highly perfumed with trumpet-shaped flowers between June and September and is a great source of nectar for invertebrates. It is a good climber and is found in the branches of trees.



c. 2 x actual size

Slender mouse-tail moss *Isoetecium myosuroides*

This moss is another characteristic species of Scotland's rainforest, found mainly on tree trunks and boulders, and forming dense mats. On closer inspection, you'll see its tree-like growth form, unbranched near its base and becoming branched above.

Dog lichen *Peltigera* sp.

This grey 'leafy' lichen most commonly lives near the forest floor. Once you have found it, take a look on its underside to see the white 'fangs' or rhizines, from which the lichen gets its common name. This lichen was used in the Middle Ages and up to the 18th century to treat dog bites – the powdered lichen was administered in milk.



c. 2 x smaller than actual size

Common polypody *Polypodium vulgare*

This evergreen fern has triangular leaflets or 'pinnae' positioned like the rungs on a ladder. It is often found living up in the branches of old oak trees within the rainforest, among the mosses and lichens. The creeping stem of the fern (rhizome) is said to be sweeter than sugar, but was also used for its medicinal properties.



Wilson's filmy fern *Hymenophyllum wilsonii*

Filmy ferns are a real gem of Scotland's rainforest. So diminutive, they are often overlooked and mistaken for bryophytes (mosses and liverworts). But take a closer look and you'll find a perfect translucent fern in miniature. Two species are resident in our Scottish rainforests, but Wilson's filmy fern is most easily recognised by its veins reaching right to the end of the fronds.



c. 3 x actual size

Ramsons *Allium ursinum*

The star-shaped white flowers of ramsons fill this hillside during the months of April to June, along with its distinctive garlic scent on a hot spring day. The Latin name *ursinum* refers to its bulb being the favourite of the brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), which used to roam Scotland over 1,000 years ago.



Ghillie dhu

A forest sprite restricted to the west coast forests of Scotland, which they protect fiercely. Ranging in size from 7 inches upwards, they are well-camouflaged with their clothes of leaves and moss. Look out for them hiding in mossy nooks and crannies. They move around a lot, so we have not been able to pinpoint them on the map!

