

# WEST HIGHLAND WAY

## Scottish Highlands

*Scotland, United Kingdom*

**DISTANCE:** 95 miles (153 km) one-way

**TIME:** 7–9 days

**PHYSICAL CHALLENGE:** 1 2 3 4 5

**PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGE:** 1 2 3 4 5

**STAGING:** Glasgow, Scotland

Certainly the premier long-distance hike in Scotland, the West Highland Way officially opened for traffic in 1980 under the auspices of the country's first national park. Although only 25 years old in its present incarnation, the West Highland Way follows historic routes as it traverses from the lowlands around Glasgow to the wilds of the Scottish Highlands. The classic walk passes through some of Scotland's most spectacular scenery as it follows ancient drove roads Highlanders traditionally used to get their cattle and sheep to market, old military roads built in the 1700s during the Jacobite uprising, former coach roads, and even the abandoned rights-of-way of old railway lines.

Over the course of its 95-mile (153 km) length, the route links Scotland's largest city to Fort William, the principle urban area of the Western Highlands. Don't be fooled by the urban beginnings near Glasgow; the trail is a veritable tour of Scottish superlatives. Hiking the length of the route takes you past the wild shores of Loch Lomond, Scotland's largest, through the wilds of Rannoch Moor, Scotland's biggest, and eventually 4,077-foot (1,243 m) Ben Nevis, Scotland's tallest. You'll see more sheep and cattle than wildlife, but keep an eye peeled for wild goats and red deer, and Golden Eagles wheeling above the moors.

Much of the trail is roughly parallel to either a road or a railway line, or both, but there are wilder stretches of open moor and high hills in the far north. Those memorable sections of Scottish Highland hill walking can be enhanced by taking an extra day in certain sections to climb some of the

higher mountains nearby. But even the route's more civilized sections have tremendous appeal, taking you to classic Highland villages, such as Bridge of Orchy, the 200-year-old inns in the valley of Glen Falloch, even a cave where Scottish outlaw Rob Roy once hid his captives. You get a bit of wilderness travel on this weeklong route, but much more besides.

The West Highland Way is becoming an international attraction as well, drawing each year more than 10,000 visitors from outside Scotland. At almost 100 miles, the route is long enough for most, but if you've got more time the West Highland Way can be combined with the Great Glen

Way, opened in 2002, to form a 170-mile (274 km) walking route from Glasgow to Inverness. An even newer long-distance route opened in 2003, the Rob Roy Way, goes from Drymen to Pit Lochy, and proves that the Scots are enthusiastic walkers

Getting accustomed to the local idiom and walking tradition takes a wee while, but that's part of the fun. Some Scottish terms we've all heard before, *glen* for valley, *loch* for lake, *moor* for heather slope, *burn* for creek, *fell* for hill. Others are more esoteric: Much of the Way follows "military roads," but these were built in the 1700s for wagons and horses, and better resemble a wide, stony path. Some terms



*The sun rises on Beinn Dorain in cloud as the West Highland Way skirts Beinn Odhar, between Tyndrum and Glen Coe.*

PHOTO BY TINA NORRIS.