

LOCH ASCOG TO CNOCNICOLL WOOD – ROUTE 2 / 1

Route: Pick up the West Island Way where it crosses the B881 1.2 km south of the United Church of Bute and stay on it for the rest of the route. This will take you down the hill to the southern end of Loch Ascog, before a long steady climb up to the high moor, and the Cnocnicoll waypoint.

Start point Coordinates: 55.81812,-5.05482

Length: 1.9 km

Terrain: The entire route is on a good stone path. Gradients are 10 to 15% with no really steep sections. You are climbing a total of 50 metres from Loch Ascog to the high moorland.

As you travel

This route is quite different from Route 1. Begin by walking down the gentle slope towards Loch Ascog. The views are open, allowing you to glimpse the Firth of Clyde, on a clear day. The farms raise mixed livestock, sheep and cattle, all of which have access to Loch Ascog's western shore.

When you reach the valley bottom, pause and go quietly down to the bird hide. This end of the loch is immensely peaceful, you may see a cormorant fishing, or any number of wildfowl if you visit in late autumn or winter.

Now starts a long steady climb to the moor. You are enclosed in a tunnel of mixed hedgerows and trees. So many different species. Oak, rowan, hawthorn, fuchsia, broom, elder, to name but a few. Whilst these trees and bushes crowd around you, creating a pleasant sight, they also limit your view until they are parted at west-facing field gates. Break off the climb and look out over the gates. The views are longer now, stretching to the Cowal Hills and reaching far up the Clyde.

This part of the route finishes as you walk beside the developing moorland. There is thick gorse to the east, preventing you from moving in that direction. The west side appears more open, but this area is a deep bog, covered with bog cotton and sphagnum mosses. As you reach the trees to the east you will find the West Island Way waymarker and information board.

Think as you go

Throughout this route the perspective has changed, the distance you can see has expanded and shrunk. Is it like life's journey? There are times when the way forward seems clear and peaceful, and others, when everything changes quickly into steep climbs and closed pathways. Even beautiful paths can be restrictive, preventing us from changing course, lulling us into simply moving ahead.

The best views on this route are seen when we stop and step aside for a moment. Even when all around is uninteresting and alternative pathways are impassable, we can still look up. Did you forget to include the sky in your thoughts as you travel?

Celtic thoughts

Celtic monks and clerics were very rooted in the landscapes that surrounded them. They drew their thinking about how to approach God, and life, from the things they saw around them. What have you learned from this path you walked today?

