

Roaming Free

19th-century activists led a historic fight for public access to the dramatic route known as Jock's Road

by ROSS BRANNIGAN



A LONG stretch of remote trails connects Ballater and Angus, once used by cattle drovers to move livestock from Auchallater to Glen Doll.

The whole 22km (13.6 mile) route is known as Jock's Road, and can be undertaken by fit and experienced walkers in a long day or broken up with an overnight camp. I planned a pleasant 16km (10 mile) adventure to enjoy some of the best this trail has to offer, as well as exploring the neighbouring glen.

Shouldering my pack at the Glen Doll car park – postcode DD8 4RD – I headed to the forest, passing the waymarkers for forest walks, with September sun breaking the canopy of pines. The forest hugged me in close as I followed the White Water river. After 1.5km (0.9 miles), the path branched, with a sign to “Jock's Road” bearing right.

Left would take you to the impressive Corrie Fee – a stunning glacial corrie below the munros of Mayar and

Driesh and an ecologically stunning place. It's very popular with campers, evident by the half-dozen walking the opposite direction.

Following Jock's Road, however, I soon reached the edge of the forest. Here, a shorter eight kilometre (five mile) route back can be followed by crossing the bridge and following the paths back to the car park, avoiding the higher ground up ahead.

In 1932, several hundred protesters famously took to Kinder Scout in the Derbyshire Peak District to fight for access to England's countryside. Yet, some five decades earlier, Scotland saw a historical fight for access of its own right here.

In 1886, Jock's Road witnessed a legal battle between the organisation now known as Scotways and then-landowner Duncan Macpherson.

Macpherson barred passage along the route, but Scotways fought to use this culturally important trail.



top tip

Take coins for the car park – it costs £2 per car.

White Water River

“The path dropped to the Glittering Skellies”

The track gave way to a path that climbed up the hillside towards the mountain shelter Davy's Bourach, identifiable by its bright red door and made in memory of a group who sadly perished on the remote plains in a winter storm in 1959.

As the path levelled out, I watched for a junction beyond Cairn Lunkard. The path dropped past Loch Esk down to the Glittering Skellies – slabs of rock which shine in the sunlight. Look back up to the Skellies to witness their glittering qualities!

I kept south of the River South Esk on my return hike. Looking at the map, I was fascinated by the fantastic names given to the hills and crags – The Gourock, The Strone, Dog Hillock and, my favourite, Juanjorge.

Crossing the river and passing by Moulzie farm, I soon re-entered the forest and was back at the car. I had walked 16km (10 miles) with 600m (1980ft) elevation, and deserved a wee seat on the picnic benches.

As I relaxed, enjoying the sound of the river passing by, I mentally thanked those who fought for public access to this fantastic route. 📍

Nearby Nature

▲ Alpine flora

The Corrie Fee National Nature Reserve is famous for its rare alpine flora such as purple and yellow saxifrage. In autumn, the whole area is carpeted with blaeberrys, cowberries and crowberries.

▲ Wildlife

Looking up to the sky, you might see golden eagles soaring above the plateau. Peregrine falcons frequent the crags and dippers bob in the waters. You could also spot mountain hares dashing across the tops.



▲ Wee trees

One of the significant features of the area is its mountain woodland – short, hardy trees designed to live at high altitudes. In 2009, NatureScot and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh planted 800 montane willows to help rejuvenate the population.

Pictures: ALAMY