

SCOTLAND



Wild and remote, anyone who knows the the Scottish Highlands well will have their own tales of true adventure.

From the shores of Loch Leven on the west coast, you'll navigate your way from coast to coast. On foot you'll locate the source of the River Tay before following it to the sea, paddling through some of Scotland's most rugged and breathtaking scenery. Exploring untracked moorland and mountains, lochs and rivers, this is the first fully fledged Secret Compass expedition in the UK and your chance to live out your own epic Scottish trekking and packrafting adventure.

Aim

The aim of this epic expedition is to cross Scotland on foot and in packraft, from Glencoe on the shores of Loch Leven on the west coast, to Perth in the east, including a source to sea journey on the River Tay.

Hike inland to the source of the River Tay on the slopes on Ben Lui before paddling its length. At 188 km long the River Tay is Scotland's longest river, almost bisecting the whole country from Ben Lui to where it flows into the North Sea at Dundee. The team will follow it for 140 km, using expedition packrafts, until reaching its tidal limit at Perth. Expect to be challenged on this expedition. The team will be fully self-supported, as they make their way across the country, kicking off with three challenging hiking days to reach Ben Lui and start the packrafting journey.

Highlights:

- Complete a challenging cross-Scotland expedition.
- A source to sea descent of Scotland's longest river.
- Forge a route on foot from Glencoe to Ben Lui.
- Summit Ben Lui, 1130 m.
- Avoid the crowds and trek through remote untracked valleys.
- Follow the River Tay from the rugged highlands to wooded valleys and moorlands.
- Learn to packraft and negotiate up to grade 2-3 rapids.

Why Go

Discover Packrafting

Learn to packraft in a truly adventurous setting – or hone your paddling skills further if already adept. Packrafts are changing the face of adventure travel. Versatile and robust, these expedition-strength inflatable boats allow

explorers to navigate the landscape in a dynamic way on and off the river. The perfect vehicle for river descents, and fully packable, they're perfect for hiking over mountains with too. If the rapids become too serious, the water too shallow or the wind too strong, we'll simply deflate the rafts, strapping them and the paddles onto our backs and continue on foot before conditions are suitable again.

A True Expedition

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit our expeditions have been on hold, and just like you we've been patiently waiting and planning for when we're able to find real adventure here on home ground. This expedition has been designed to deliver an authentic experience without the international travel. Make no mistake, this is no easy ride, this all-encompassing adventure will have you immersed in teamwork, effort and achievement in some of the most beautiful scenery the UK has to offer.

The Scottish Highlands

If you've not explored the Scottish Highlands before, this expedition will be a real treat. Passing through diverse landscapes from dramatic fjord-like lochs to craggy mountains, rolling hills and moorland before passing through villages and farmland on the final stretch to Perth. The expedition starts on the shore of Loch Leven, a narrow sea-loch reminiscent of the Norwegian fjords with steep mountains rising to all sides. Then, heading inland through Glen Coe and Glen Etive, iconic locations surrounded by rugged mountains encompassing everything you might hope for when you dream of the Scottish Highlands. This area is the home of Scottish mountaineering and both glens were used as set locations for the films Skyfall and Braveheart. Continuing south we'll cross mountain passes as we follow braided streams through remote valleys, the mountains become more rolling until you reach Ben Lui. Considered by many people to be the finest mountain in the Southern Highlands, Ben Lui's five craggy ridges meet at its 1130m summit. Significantly higher than most of its neighbours, its summit affords fantastic views in all directions.

The River Tay

The River Tay is Scotland's longest river, 188 km long from source to sea, starting as a trickle on the flanks of Ben Lui and 2 miles wide by the time it reaches the sea. Although the source of the Tay is on Ben Lui, its waters flow through the Rivers Cononish, Fillan, and Dochart and into Loch Tay, before the River Tay finally gets its name as it leaves Loch Tay. The river for the most part is flat, allowing the team to appreciate the changing landscape and spot wildlife as you paddle. However, the river is punctuated with heart-rate-rising rapids like the infamous Falls of Dochart (which for most of the team will be portaged) or Grandtully rapids to keep the team on its toes. The river passes through several beautiful small lochs as well as the dramatic Loch Tay, with the picturesque town of Kenmore at its eastern end and overlooked from the north by the towering Ben Lawers. Evidence of Scotland's rich history is visible along its banks and islands. Features along the way include the ruined Loch Dochart Castle on an island on Loch Dochart only accessible by boat. The castle was destroyed by the McNab clan in 1646 whose ancient burial grounds the river runs past in the village of Killin later in the journey. For those interested in a little more of the history of Scotland the team also pass the remains of an iron age "crannog" on the northern shores of Loch Tay as well as a replica at the Scottish Crannog Centre nearby. Crannogs are timber round-houses built on stilts over the loch, the earliest examples were built around 5000 years ago, but some were modified and used into the 17th Century.

Wildlife

If you spot it, the wildlife in this area of Scotland can be as spectacular as its landscape. Whilst hiking keep a lookout for Red deer, the UK's largest land-mammal. The antlered stags particularly impressive at this time of year. Though otters are rare in most of the UK, the River Tay and its tributaries have robust populations and it's also one of the few places in the UK home to beavers, with evidence of their presence visible along the river (gnawed and felled trees). Throughout the expedition if you cast your eyes upwards you may also be lucky enough to spot Golden Eagles or Osprey soaring overhead or perched near the tops of trees.

The Plan

Secret Compass runs expeditions with framework itineraries, rather than guided tours with set daily plans. Read more about Our Approach [here](#). The following is the outline plan for this epic Scotland expedition – the ‘substance’ rather than the specifics. A fuller itinerary is provided in the Expedition Handbook which is available on request or upon completion of a booking form.

Teammates Arrive

Meet your expedition leader in Glencoe on Day 1 for a briefing and get to know the team over dinner. Simple camping accommodation is provided tonight. Prepare your kit and yourselves for an early start as the expedition will begin after breakfast the next morning.

On expedition

On the morning of Day 2 the team will be dropped off on the shores of Loch Leven, carrying everything you need in your backpacks for your hike inland to Ben Lui. Those joining the expedition off the sleeper train this morning must come with backpacks packed ready to trek straight from the door. For the next three and a half days trek unsupported through the remote Scottish highlands to reach the intermediate goal of the summit of Ben Lui. Here team members will find what many consider to be the source of the River Tay on the flanks of Ben Lui, restock expedition supplies and pick up packrafts for the next part of the journey. Strapping rucksacks to packrafts, over the next 5 days follow the River Tay for 140 km from its headwaters in the highlands across Scotland to the city of Perth, again wild-camping along the route. There will be points along the route where team members will have to portage the rafts – the nature of packrafting means rapids are easily portaged if required or if you are not comfortable with the whitewater elements.

Goal Achieved

Mountains climbed and rapids conquered, the team will paddle directly into Perth, the tidal limit of the River Tay, on the afternoon of Day 9 for a well earned celebratory meal, shower and a comfortable bed. Accommodation is included tonight and the expedition officially finishes after breakfast on Day 10, but there are also sightseeing options in Perth if you want to extend your stay.

Additional Arrival and Departure Information

This is a one-way expedition starting in Glencoe and finishing in Perth and we suggest that teammates utilise trains to travel to and from the expedition. The nearest train station to Glencoe is Bridge of Orchy, which we will assist in arranging a transfer from on Day 1 or the morning of Day 2 (for those wanting to take the sleeper from London). On departure, Perth has a well connected mainline train station. Those wishing to travel by car could either leave the car in Glasgow and use the train service to Bridge of Orchy and our shared transfer from there, or drive to Glencoe and arrange your own transfer from Perth back to Glencoe. For both of these options, please follow government guidance on reducing transmission of COVID-19.

Fitness

Secret Compass expeditions are achievable by anyone with a healthy lifestyle and a good level of general fitness. Team members should be willing to be part of a team working together to achieve the goal of the expedition. The biggest challenge on this expedition will be carrying heavy rucksacks during the trekking phase and some challenging whitewater on the river, although this can be avoided if required.

Applicants will receive a Scotland Handbook with further expedition information. Rafting beginners are welcome on this team, see [FAQ](#) section. Teammates who arrive without meeting minimum fitness requirements can jeopardise themselves and the expedition’s goal so do take training seriously, prepare as appropriate and arrive fit and ready to go.

Teammates must be comfortable with the following:

Minimum Fitness Requirements

- Expedition Grading: 270°.
- Daily activity: varies but up to approx. 10 hours per day.
- Trek: up to 15-20km per day with daily ascents of 700 – 1100m.
- Carry: approx. 20 kg including own kit and equipment and a share of group kit and food.
- Terrain: Varied. Rough, open moorland, bog, grassy, scree or bouldery slopes, possibly occasional rocky scrambling. For most of the time expect there to be no paths. There will also be some river crossings. Ben Lui is the only planned summit en-route, but there are several ridges and colls with 500-700m of ascent.
- Altitude: up to 1130m.
- Packraft. Up to 30 km per day, mostly flat water but up to grade 3. We'll need to portage boats and backpacks around un-navigable sections which will depend on water levels.
- Swim: strong swimmers who can swim at least 200m, are happy with the prospect of falling from a packraft in rapids and capable of pulling themselves back into a raft if needed.
- Climate: The Scottish Highlands in September can experience anything from balmy, sunny "Indian summers" to gales and rain. Most likely will be something in between but you'll need to be prepared for all eventualities.
- Age: over 21, fit and healthy.

Included

Included

- Professional Secret Compass leader carrying medical and communications kits.
- Accommodation from the night of Day 1 to the night of Day 9
- All packrafting equipment and shared camping equipment
- All food during the expedition phase (lunch on Day 2 until lunch on Day 9)
- Shared transfer from Bridge of Orchy to Glencoe

Not included

- Travel to Bridge of Orchy and from Perth
- Meals or drinks in Glencoe and Perth
- Personal equipment (full kit list in the Handbook)
- Travel insurance (recommended)
- Visas (if required)

Exped FAQ

On request to join this expedition in Scotland, potential teammates will receive a detailed Expedition Handbook. Here are some Scotland-specific questions and our [general FAQ](#) will answer many other questions. Get in touch if your question remains unanswered.

I'm a total beginner at trekking. Can I come?

Unfortunately not. Although this expedition is UK based it is still a challenging expedition and teammates should have experience of multi-day or overnight trekking carrying weight. You must be physically prepared as per the Fitness tab and Handbook's instructions, ensure you have the right kit and that your boots are worn in.

I'm a total rafting beginner. Can I come?

Yes, training will be provided. The majority of the journey is on flat water, and for the white-water sections packrafts are very forgiving and great for beginners. If necessary, higher grade whitewater sections can be avoided by portaging although teammates should come with the anticipation of rafting as much as possible. Rapids will be risk assessed on a dynamic case-by-case basis with the skill and confidence levels of teammate taken into account.

Although no whitewater experience is required, a little paddling experience of some sort would be beneficial so that you know it's an activity you enjoy.

Can I bring my own packraft?

Yes, contact Secret Compass to arrange the details.

Will there be phone signal?

Definitely not at all times and less likely during our trekking phase. Potentially patchy signal during the paddle, improving as we pass by towns. Your expedition leader will carry satellite communications for emergency use.

The forecast looks good – do I really need waterproofs?

Have you ever been to Scotland? Please take the kit list provided in your handbook seriously as Secret Compass only recommends things we think you might need. The weather can be variable at any time of the year in Scotland and indeed the UK in general.

Can I talk with other teammates?

Secret Compass will set up a WhatsApp group for this expedition prior to departure as it does with all expeditions. This will help you answer kit and training questions among yourselves.

Can I charge my electricals?

There will be no opportunity to charge electricals once you have left Glencoe.

What measures will be in place regarding COVID-19?

This is a quickly changing situation and we will be monitoring and reviewing Scottish restrictions and guidelines for COVID-19 safety over the coming weeks. Various measures are available and can be taken depending on guidance at the time of departure, some examples are below:

- If, by the time of departure there are restrictions in place regarding the number of people or households that are allowed to meet outside, we will abide by these.
- Apart from accommodation and meals in Glencoe and Perth, the expedition is entirely outdoors and there is plenty of room to socially distance during all expedition activities outside of emergency situations. This makes the expedition phase very low risk with regard to COVID-19.
- All teammates will be required to bring sufficient hand-gel for the duration of the expedition to maintain good hand hygiene.
- Shared group equipment such as stoves or water filters can be designated for one person only to be in charge of carrying and using each item if required.
- Hotel rooms and tents will be single shared, unless members of a household are travelling together.
- We may require you to bring a face-mask for group transfers.
- Expedition ration packs only require the addition of boiling water to prepare, and your expedition food will be individually packed into sealed bags at least 72 hours prior to departure if required.
- If COVID-19 regulations mean we are unable to run the expedition then our [new booking promise](#) means you will be entitled to a refund if desired, or a credit note.

I live outside of the UK, can I join the expedition?

Yes of course, but as with all of our expeditions, ensuring you comply with entry requirements for the country an expedition is held in is the responsibility of individual team mates. This may include a visa, if required, or in the current situation, additional COVID-19 related entry requirements. If you are joining this trip from overseas you may be subject to additional COVID-19 related entry requirements such as mandatory 14-day quarantine. You can

find more information on COVID-19 related restriction on entering Scotland [here](#). Please ensure you research and monitor the requirements for your own personal situation.

How can I find out more?

Get in touch with SCHQ to receive a copy of the Expedition Handbook with further details on this upcoming expedition and the next steps to joining the team.