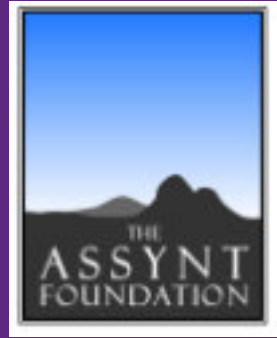


Glencanisp Nature Trail



This nature trail is a short walk that you can do in less than half an hour starting at *Glencanisp Lodge*. It will give you a great view over the best of *Glencanisp Estate*.



likely grown black oats and bere barley on the land you now walk on - potatoes were not introduced until 1760. Black cattle would also have roamed here.

The Glencanisp Nature Trail is 500m long with a good path over its length. You can start from either end.

As you walk around the route you will glimpse, in miniature, the process that is happening all over Glencanisp estate; the restoration of a landscape to its natural state with all the natural processes functioning to create a healthy ecosystem.

To understand this area however, you must first know a bit about its history. The lodge and its policies stand amidst the stunning beauty and stark landscape of Assynt which has seen many changes over the years. Parts of the land, now seemingly deserted, were once home to small settlements and isolated homesteads. Indeed, the lodge sits on what was formerly known as Drumswardalain where four households once stood. The people would have



View of Suilven

Many of these settlements were cleared to make room for extensive sheep grazing. The lodge here was built in 1850 by Sutherland Estates as a house for John Scobie, the tenant of the new Lochinver sheep farm.

Then, as sheep farming became less profitable, this part of Assynt was set aside for deer stalking. The property was extended to become a shooting lodge and exotic conifer trees were planted around the building.



Glencanisp Lodge

Today the Glencanisp estate (13,000ha) and the adjacent Drumrunie estate (5,000ha) are owned by the people of Assynt. They were bought in June 2005 under the new right to buy legislation and are now managed by the Assynt Foundation on behalf of the community and the public.

The plantation of conifers has largely blown down and is being replaced by birch, rowan, oak and other native broad-leaved trees. A deer fence prevents the young saplings from being eaten by deer.

With the conifers gone, sunlight can now reach the ground. Lichens and mosses are first to colonise the open ground. Where the

ground is very wet sphagnum moss grows well. It will eventually one day become peat and lock away tons of carbon out of the atmosphere.



Turkeytail bracket fungus *Trametes versicolor*

Fungi have started to work on the fallen trees; recycling all the nutrients from the decaying timber and enriching the soil so plants can grow healthier.

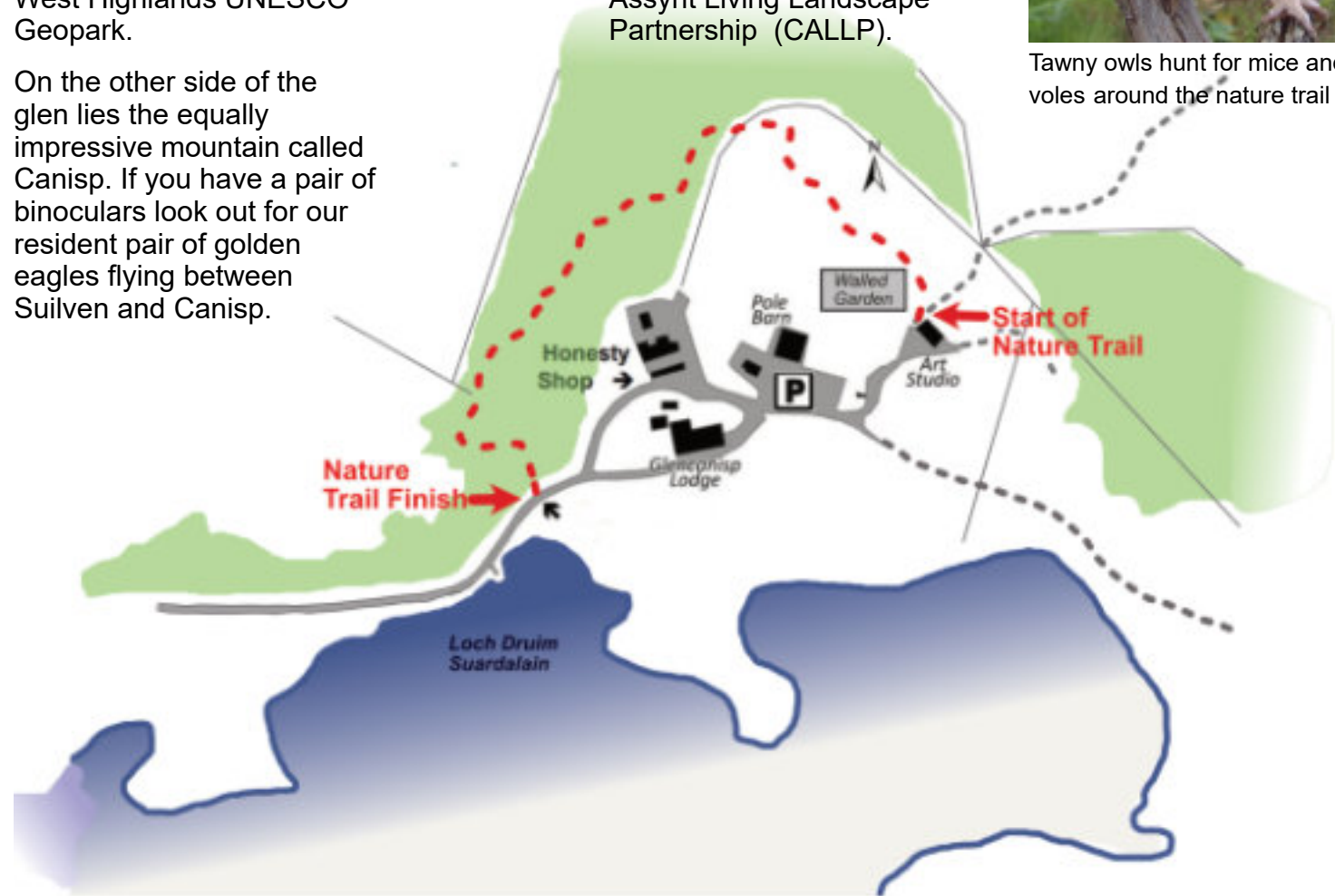
Once you get a bit of height the nature trail provides an unrivalled view of the estate and in particular the mountain called Suilven. Many folk reckon the word comes from the Norse, meaning Grey Pillar. The highest point, Caisteal Liath is Gaelic and means the Grey Castle. Suilven is only 731m tall but because of the long walk into the base it will take you a good eight hours to get there and back.

On a clear day you can see the layered strata of rock on its flanks. These layers were laid down 900 million years ago and give a clue to the mountain's origin. Back then, great rivers, flowing from what is today North America, deposited sand and gravel all over Assynt. In places the sand debris was 7km deep.

Subsequent erosion has left these isolated peaks of

Torridonian Sandstone, of which Suilven is perhaps the most well known. These inselbergs, as they are called, are one reason Assynt is part of the North West Highlands UNESCO Geopark.

On the other side of the glen lies the equally impressive mountain called Canisp. If you have a pair of binoculars look out for our resident pair of golden eagles flying between Suilven and Canisp.



The nature trail was built in 2017 with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Scottish Rural Development Programme as part of Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Partnership (CALLP).



Tawny owls hunt for mice and voles around the nature trail

Lichens play a key role in the early stages of plant succession by accessing the minerals in bare rocks and helping build the soils.



Tree Lungwort *Lobaria pulmonaria*

Some of the more advanced lichens, such as tree lungwort lichen, grows well here. You can see it on the large old beech trees. It is the largest lichen found in the British Isles and is a good indicator species of our Scottish rainforest, where it likes a wet climate, typical of the west of Scotland. Lichens are often used as an indicator of clean air

The woodlands in Assynt are also a wellspring of diverse fern species. Look for maidenhair spleenwort on walls of the garden, and common polypody growing on the large boulders.



Maidenhair spleenwort Common polypody

There are also good stands of broad buckler-fern, golden-scaled male-fern, hard fern, and also the very special oak fern. Look for the triangular-shaped, pale green fronds of the oak fern growing under the rocks.

Dense stands of bracken are an indicator of disturbed ground, including past human occupation.



Golden-scaled male fern Oak fern



Wild Hyacinth or Bluebell

The feather light seeds of downy birch and eared willow have already blown in from nearby woodlands. These species are pioneer trees on any new ground. Notice the 'witches brooms' on the downy birch; curious twiggy growths or galls, probably caused by a fungus *Taphrina betulina*.



Witches broom growing on downy birch

When grazing is reduced it allows all sorts of flowering plants to flourish. In spring, before the bracken grows too tall, you will see a

valuable representation of typical woodland flora. Where the soil is richest in nutrients you may see bluebells, pignut, yellow pimpernel, greater stitchwort and others.

Although the soils over most of Glencanisp estate are often thin and waterlogged, and the bedrock very close to the surface, nevertheless the ground around the lodge has been modified so large trees can grow. Tawny owls hunt for mice and voles here, under the canopy of the sycamore and beech. Great-spotted woodpeckers also make nest holes in the dead branches.

The 18,000 hectares of the Glencanisp and Drumrunie Estates are open for access on foot all year. But please follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

www.outdooraccess-scotland.scot



Lesser Celandine

You have to be a walker to see the interior of the estate as there are no roads across them. And please be aware there may be stalking taking place during the deer management season from 1st July to 15th February.

For more information about the Assynt Foundation go to:

www.assyntfoundation.scot

Charity number SC036540

How to get to the Nature Trail

- Take the Glencanisp Lodge road from Lochinver.
- Proceed approximately 1.5km along the single track. We would prefer if you park at the walkers car park if possible.
- Another 1km will take you past Loch Druim Suardalain to the Lodge.
- Parking is available near the Pole Barn for those less able to walk and if the walkers' carpark is full.

If driving all the way up, make sure you take the left fork in the track at Glencanisp Lodge & pass between the Lodge and the Honesty Shop.

Glencanisp Nature Trail: Published by Assynt Foundation 2021

Photographs: ©David Haines; ©Chris Puddephatt; ©Andy Summers.

Designed by: ©Andy Summers 2021

This production of this booklet was only possible with the support of the Coigach and Assynt Living Landscape Partnership scheme and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Scottish Rural Development Programme.

