

13 THE LOST VALLEY

Distance: 5km/3.1mi; 2h10min

Grade: a short, easy-moderate walk involving a relatively sharp ascent of 230m/754ft on a rough path through a boulder-strewn valley

Equipment: 3- or 4-season walking boots should be worn, and it is a good idea to be prepared for changes in the mountain weather but no other equipment is necessary. OS Landranger sheet 41

How to get there and return: 🚗 Park at either of two car parks situated just west of the cottage at Allt-na-reigh in Glen Coe (Car tour 4). 🚌 Scheduled coaches and buses are unlikely to stop for you in the Pass of Glencoe, but the Glencoe to Glen Etive Postbus will do so. Nearest accommodation is at the Clachaig Inn or in Glencoe village.

Longer walks: The possibilities for both high- and low-level walks are endless. The fabulous array of peaks and ridges above Glen Coe all have challenging routes of ascent, with the mountains above the Coire Gabhail being the highest of them all. From the turning-back point in Walk 13, you could continue southwest up the steep wall at the head of the corrie, onto the ridge. Then turn right for the summit of Bidean nam Bian. Return via Stob Coire nan Lochan (10km/6.2mi; 6h). A fine low-level walk would be to explore the Lairig Eilde and Lairig Gartain in a circuit around the Buachaille Etive Beag (13.4km/8.5mi; 6h), beginning from The Study or at Dalness.

It is hard to imagine a more dramatic and secluded setting than the Coire Gabhail, surrounded as it is by the towering peaks of Bidean nam Bian, Argyll's highest mountain. Here, the unruly MacDonalDs used to hide their stolen cattle, confident that they would remain undiscovered; this is presumably how the corrie became known as The Lost Valley. The true magnificence of the place is best realised by climbing up to the flat mouth of the corrie, a mountain sanctuary hidden from the Pass of Glencoe.

Begin the walk from one of the two large CAR PARKS beside the A82 in Glen Coe, west of the cottage at Allt-na-reigh. (In summer you can *hear* exactly where to park. For the benefit of foreign tourists who arrive by the coach-

Glen Coe: the
Lost Valley



load, tartan-clad pipers gather at the car parks to play the same tired old tunes. But then audible discord and reinforcing the Highland myth has never got in the way of selling Scotland!) Escape the noise by walking down to meet the footpath below the road.

Follow the path all the way down to the footbridge over the **River Coe (15min)** and climb up through the birch scrub on the south side. There is a ladder STILE (25min) over fencing at the top of an enclosure. The trees within are slowly regenerating, being spared the ravages of grazing. The stream on your left tumbles by in a series of lovely cascades through the narrow defile between Beinn Fhada and Gairr Aonach. With Aonach Dubh, the three mountains rise in near-vertical fashion, appearing above Glen Coe as huge daunting buttresses of bare rock and known collectively as **The Three Sisters**.

Wood anemones, bluebells and primroses are among the flowers that bring splashes of springtime colour to the woodland which cloaks the bank-side. The path weaves between a jumble of boulders and having stepped across the stream, the **Allt Coire Gabhail (45min)**, climbs to the top of the wood. The gradient eases off and then suddenly, on reaching the lip of the **Coire Gabhail (55min)**, a flat boulder-strewn corrie floor stretches out in front of you. Surrounded by an impressive skyline of peaks, the corrie is a quiet and secluded sanctuary, a setting that has been described as an Alpine cirque.

Adventurous campers will find the grassy floor perfect for putting up a tent, while scramblers can exercise on the huge boulders scattered around. Walk on a little further if you wish to explore the deeper recesses of the corrie floor; perhaps you might even discover just where the stream, the Allt Coire Gabhail, has disappeared to! But above all The Lost Valley is a place for ponderers; it deserves a contemplative approach.

Head back to the main road in Glen Coe, following the Allt Coire Gabhail downstream by the same path (2h10min).

