Rock and Water

No-one can visit the Bruar Water without being impressed by the striking combination of rock and water seen in the river, as it tumbles over a series of waterfalls into Glen Garry. The character of the falls changes constantly with the weather, the light or with the seasons. Sometimes wild and impressive, at other times more tranquil, the falls are never dull. As Robert Burns wrote:

Here foaming down the skelvy rocks
In twisting strength I rin;
There high my boiling torrent smokes
Wild roaring o'er a linn.

It is the 'skelvy' or layered nature of the rock which does much to determine the character of the falls. These ancient rocks – thought to have originally been marine sediments – were uplifted and tilted by the great forces which created this part of the Scottish Highlands some 500 million years ago. The gorge and the waterfalls have probably been formed in the last 10,000 years since the glaciers disappeared from Glen Garry at the end of the last Ice Age.

Erosion has sought out the softer layers and weaknesses in the rock, leaving the harder layers to form the outcrops and waterfalls in the river bed. In places the rocks have been worn smooth by the action of the water. One of the best-known features of the falls is seen below the Lower Bridge, where the river has broken through the rock to form a natural arch.

View of the Upper Falls

The falls are at their most spectacular after heavy rain, or during the melting of the snows in spring. Then the Bruar can become a raging torrent, plunging from pool to pool. Much of the time the Bruar is in more tranquil mood, though, as the circuit judge Lord Cockburn remarked after a visit to the falls in 1844:

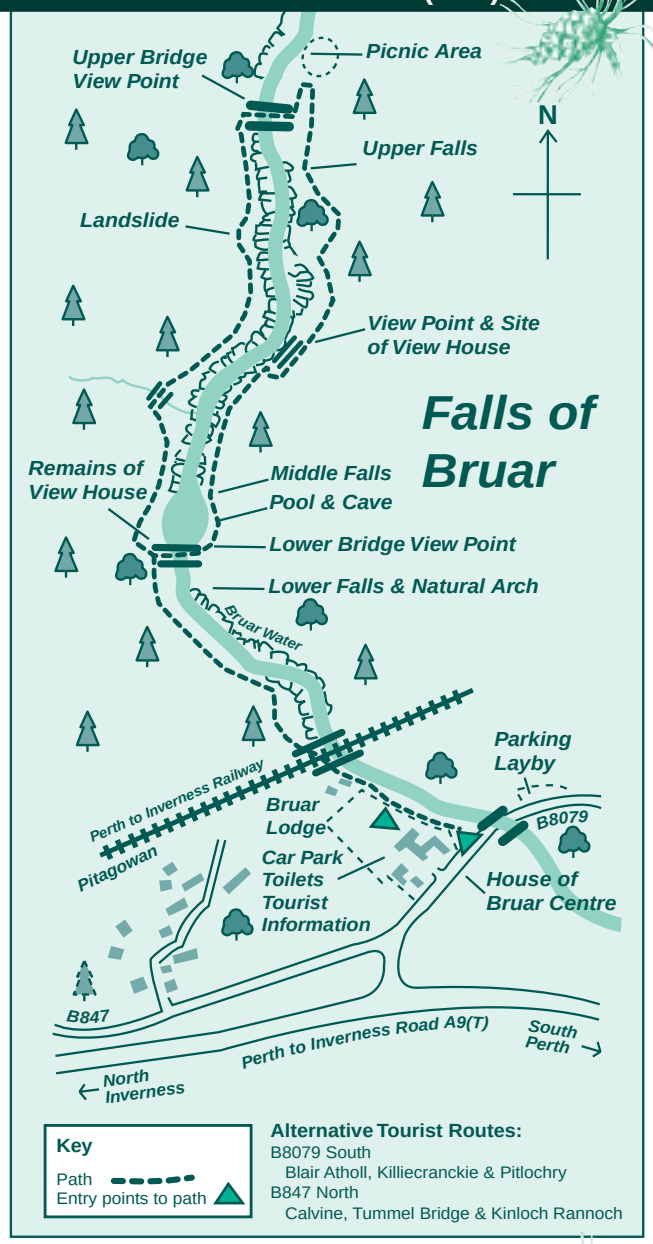
> *The ravines through which the water tumbles are so narrow in proportion to the size of the stream that there can never be any apparent deficiency of water.*

Now that water is extracted from the Bruar upstream of the falls, for the generation of hydro-electric power, we are no longer able to see the falls in their full glory.

At times of lower flow the water is often stained brown by the peat through which it must flow to reach the river. The artist Joseph Farington, who visited the falls in 1801, remarked on the contrast which this produced with the surrounding rocks:-

> *A bridge of light coloured stone crosses the top of the fall, and the rocks under it are of a very light colour. The deep toned colour of the water opposed to tints approaching to white gave tone and substance to the effect which white water would not have done in so great a degree.*

Circular Walk Distance 1 mile (1.6k)



Trees and Wildlife

To see the Bruar as it was when the first visitors came in the eighteenth century, we must imagine the scene without trees. The river bed was open and exposed, as Burns' poem describes:

How saucy Phebus' scorching beams
In flaming summer pride,
Dry withering waste my foamy streams
And drink my crystal tide.

Some early visitors, like William Gilpin in 1776, were disappointed. He felt the falls to be:

> *Scarce worth so long and perpendicular a walk. One of them indeed is a grand fall, but is so naked in its accompaniments that ... it is of little value.*

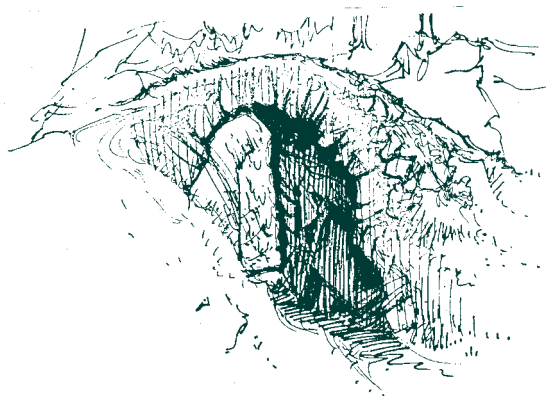
Robert Burns, in his petition to the Duke of Atholl, asks for the falls to be surrounded with *'lofty firs and ashes cool'* and with *'fragrant birks in woodbines drest'*, whether to provide shelter for visitors or protection for wild creatures. When the first plantations were made in the winter of 1796 to 1797, they were entirely of European Larch and Scots Pine, for the Duke had more than just ornament in mind. As he was later to write in his forestry journal:

> *In my opinion Planting ought to be carried on for Beauty, Effect and Profit.*

In his lifetime 'Planter John', as he came to be known, planted some 15 million larch trees alone in more than 10,000 acres of plantations on his estates. Some of the early visitors disliked the use of these unfamiliar coniferous trees in place of native broadleaved species, objecting to the regular pattern of their growth.

Most of the trees were felled during the Second World War, and later replanted. Only on the steepest slopes and close to the river did the older trees escape the woodsman's axe. Replanting was done with Scots Pine and Hybrid Larch. Natural regeneration of native broadleaved trees such as the birch, the rowan or mountain ash, the aspen and the willow brings variety to the scene, together with other introduced conifers such as spruce and fir.

In places, as you walk round, you will see more open areas where moorland plants have survived the shade. Common heather or ling, and the blaeberry are both easy to find, while a more careful search will reveal bell-heather, cowberry and the occasional juniper bush. Rhododendrons grow beside the path in places and on rocks above the Bruar Water. Victorians planted much Rhododendron for landscape enhancement. The variety of habitats provides cover for many kinds of birds and animals.



3. Paths, Bridges and Viewpoints

The earliest travellers to visit the Scottish Highlands would have viewed the Bruar with real horror. Only as travel was made safer by the building of roads and bridges did travellers begin to view the mountains in a new light. Places like the Falls of Bruar soon became regular stopping places on tours of the Highlands.

Today's visitor to the falls is able to follow a path leading from the road, and may cross the Bruar by either of two bridges. Earlier visitors did not have such conveniences, and were obliged to scramble over rocks and streams.

The path which you follow was laid out at the time of the first plantations in 1797, and the bridges built to conduct people safely across the Bruar. They serve no purpose other than that of enabling visitors to appreciate the spectacle of the falls. You may notice that the path runs close to the gorge only where the best views may be obtained. In other places the visitor is led away from less spectacular stretches of river bank.

At one time a number of shelters were constructed at the key view-points along the path. These were variously described as view-houses, grottoes, shieldings or pastoral huts. Only part of one of these, built of stone, survives, close to the Lower Bridge.

Here a skilfully contrived stone arch hides the Middle Falls from view until the last moment. Originally seats and a thatched wooden shelter provided a resting place overlooking the fall. A flight of stone steps led down to the pool below.

The other main view-house stood on a ledge on the east side of the gorge, to give views of the Upper Falls. Few traces of this structure now survive, while elsewhere on the walk evidence of other view-houses is difficult to find. Can you tell where they might have been?

While some visitors no doubt appreciated the paths and shelters constructed by the Duke, others felt that they detracted from the wild character of the falls. Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus, visiting in 1815, complained that:

> *So many summer houses and hermitages and peep-bo places ... had been planted on favourite situations that the proper character of the wild torrent was completely lost.*

William Wordsworth, visiting in 1803, objected to the Gravel Walks *... brushed neatly without a blade of grass or a weed upon them.*

The clutter of view-houses has now disappeared, and time and nature have mellowed the once formal paths. The work of the masons and labourers was well done, however, as we are still able, nearly two centuries later, to enjoy the spectacle of the falls in relative comfort and safety.

It is easy for the works of man to detract from those of nature. At Bruar we try to ensure that you can enjoy the falls in their natural state, and without risk. We hope you will be tempted to return.

Local Walks

Falls of Bruar

PERTH & KINROSS COUNCIL

Planning & Development Services

The Humble Petition of Bruar Water to the Noble Duke of Atholl

Robert Burns visited the Falls of Bruar on Sunday, 2nd September, 1787, during a brief tour of the Highlands. The poem was written soon after.

My Lord, I know, your noble ear
Woe ne'er assails in vain;
Embolden'd thus, I beg you'll hear
Your humble slave complain
How saucy Phebus' scorching beams,
In flaming summer-pride,
Dry-withering, waste my foamy streams,
And drink my crystal tide.

The lightly-jumping, glowrin' trouts
That thro- my waters play,
If, in their random, wanton spouts,
They near the margin stay:
If, hapless chance! they linger lang,
I'm scorching up so shallow
They're left, the whitening stanes amang
In gasping death to wallow.

Last day I grat wi' spite and teen,
As Poet BURNS cam by,
That, to a Bard, I should be seen
Wi' half my channel dry:
A panegyric rhyme, I ween,
Even as I was he shor'd me;
But had I in my glory been,
He, kneeling, wad ador'd me.

Here, foaming down the skelvy rocks,
In twisting strength I rin;
There, high my boiling torrent smokes,
Wild-roaring o'er a linn:
Enjoying large each spring and well
As Nature gave them me,
I am, altho' I say't mysel,
Worth gaun a mile to see.

Would, then, my noble master please
To grant my highest wishes?
He'll shade my banks wi' towering trees,
And bonie spreading bushes.
Delighted doubly then, my Lord,
You'll wander on my banks,
And listen mony a grateful bird
Return you tuneful thanks.

The sober laverock, warbling wild,
Shall to the skies aspire;
The gowdspink, Music's gayest child,
Shall sweetly join the choir:
The blackbird strong, the linnwhite clear,
The mavis mild and mellow;
The robin pensive Autumn chear,
In all her locks of yellow.

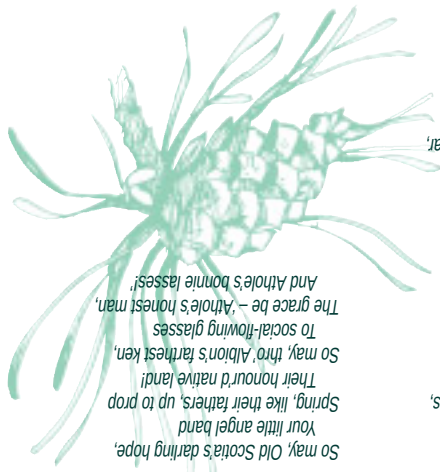
This, too, a convert shall ensure
To shield them from the storm;
And coward maukin sleep secure
Low in her grassy form:
Here shall the shepherd make his seat,
To weave his crown of flow'rs;
Or find a sheltring, safe retreat,
From prone-descending show'rs.

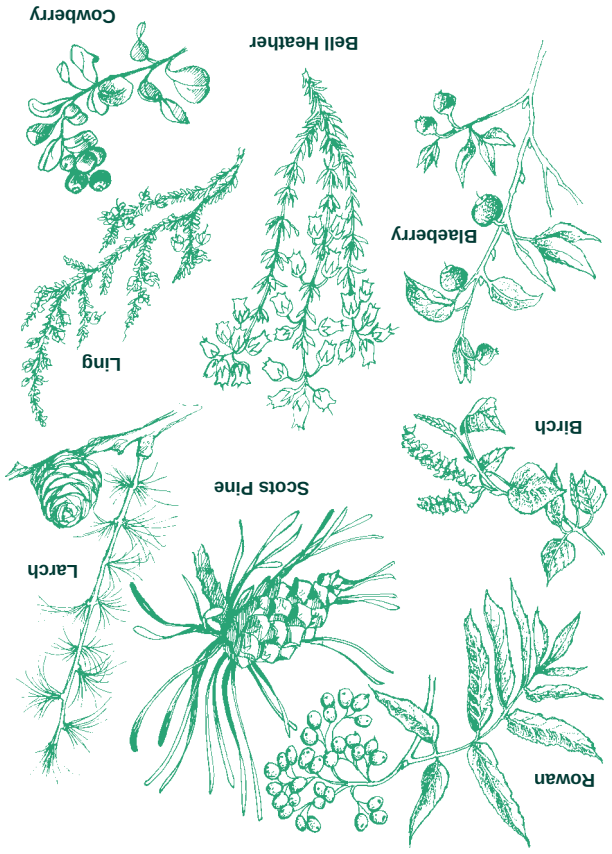
And here, by sweet, endearing stealth,
Shall meet the loving pair,
Despising worlds, with all their wealth,
As empty, idle care:
The flowers shall vie in all their charms
The hour of heav'n to grace,
And birks extend their fragrant arms
To screen the dear embrace.

Here hardy, too, at vernal dawn
Some musing bard may stray,
And eye the smoking, dewy lawn,
And misty mountains grey;
Or, by the reaper's nightly beam,
Mild-chequering thro' the trees,
Rave to may darkly dashing stream,
Horse-swelling on the breeze.

Let lofty firs, and ashes cool,
My lowly banks o'erspread,
And view, deep-bending in the pool,
Their shadows' wat'ry-bed:
Let fragrant birks, in woodbines drest,
My craggy cliffs adorn;
And, for the little songster's nest,
The close embowl'ring thorn.

So may, Old Scotia's darling hope,
Your little angel band
Spring, like their fathers, up to prop
Their honour'd native land!
So may, thro' Albion's farthest ken,
To social-flowing glasses
The grace be – 'Athole's honest men,
And Athole's bonnie lasses!'





Designed by Corporate Services, Perth & Kinross Council

Text: Christopher Dingwall Illustrations: Hilary Moore, M Roberts

We acknowledge the support of:

SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE

Europe and Scotland Making it **work together**

Perth & Kinross Council RANGER SERVICE

For further information please contact:

Countryside Ranger Service
Planning & Development Services
Perth & Kinross Council
Pullar House, 35 Kinnoull Street
PERTH PH1 5GD
Tel: 01738 475392/475258

Atholl Estates Ranger Service
Estates Office
Blair Atholl
PH18 5TH
Tel: 01796 481355

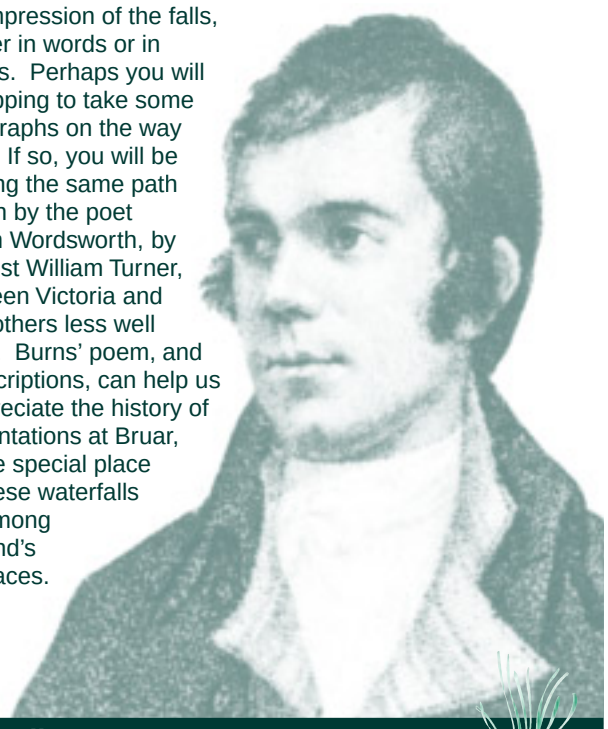
Bruar's Common Trees and Plants

Welcome to the Falls of Bruar, one of Scotland's finest wild landscapes.

For more than two hundred years the Falls of Bruar have been a place of pilgrimage. Throughout this time all kinds of people have been attracted to the waterfalls, poets and to the wild grandeur of their surroundings. As you walk along the banks of the Bruar Water today, you are treading in the footsteps of these people – travellers, poets, painters, nobility, even royalty – all of whom have sought or found inspiration in this place.

When the first visitors came to view the falls in the eighteenth century the Bruar Water flowed not among the woods which you see today, but across a bare, open hillside. The first trees were planted by John Murray, Fourth Duke of Atholl, not long after the celebrated Scots poet Robert Burns had visited the falls, and had been inspired to write a poem about them. In the poem, written in 1787, Burns imagined that he was the Bruar Water, and pleaded with the Duke of Atholl to plant its banks with trees. The poet was already dead by the time the plantations were made, but the verses and the vision which they contain ensure that Burns' name, more than any other, is associated with this place.

Others besides Robert Burns recorded their impression of the falls, whether in words or in pictures. Perhaps you will be stopping to take some photographs on the way round. If so, you will be following the same path trodden by the poet William Wordsworth, by the artist William Turner, by Queen Victoria and many others less well known. Burns' poem, and its descriptions, can help us to appreciate the history of the plantations at Bruar, and the special place that these waterfalls hold among Scotland's wild places.



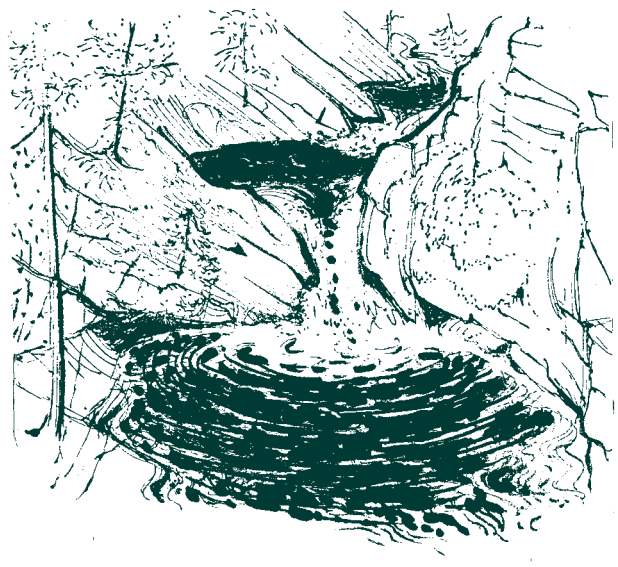
The Walk

The path leads from the car parks near the House of Bruar Centre up the west bank of the river, passing under the Perth to Inverness railway by way of a short tunnel. On reaching the lower bridge, it is suggested that you cross to the east bank, and follow the path up to the upper bridge. Half way up you can obtain spectacular views of the gorge and upper falls. After crossing the upper bridge you can return by the path on the west bank to the lower bridge, and from there back to the centre. The total distance is a little over one mile. Strong footwear is recommended, as the path is steep and uneven.

Care should be taken especially with young children, as the banks are hazardous in places.

This leaflet is intended as a companion to the walk, and may be read as you rest on your way round. The map and description overleaf draw attention to the main points of interest.

Although they appear to be wild, the Falls of Bruar need careful management. Please help us to maintain the character of the falls by taking care not to disturb the wildlife, and by not picking the plants and damaging the trees. Please keep dogs under control and take litter home with you.



Other Places to Visit

If you enjoy your visit to the Bruar, you may wish to visit other similar walks in the area.

- **Pass of Killiecrankie** and Linn of Tummel (National Trust for Scotland)
- **Birks of Aberfeldy** and Falls of Moness (Perth & Kinross Council)
- **The Hermitage** and Falls of Braan, Dunkeld (National Trust for Scotland)
- **Blair Castle** and Grounds, Blair Atholl (Atholl Estates)

Guide leaflets are available, and Countryside Rangers are often on hand to answer your questions.