



Self-led learning in the National Park

Balmaha

Balmaha is a small village on the eastern shores of Loch Lomond. It's an essential stop for West Highland Way walkers, home to our National Park Visitor Centre, a great base for climbing Conic Hill and exploring the island of Inchcailloch. The Highland Boundary fault runs through Balmaha and across Loch Lomond, and this can best be appreciated from the summit of Conic Hill.

Balmaha is a very popular location for tourists, as well as school and group visits throughout the year. It can get very busy, and popular paths such as Conic Hill can be very congested. Please consider your group size, the experience of the group and the leaders when planning your visit.

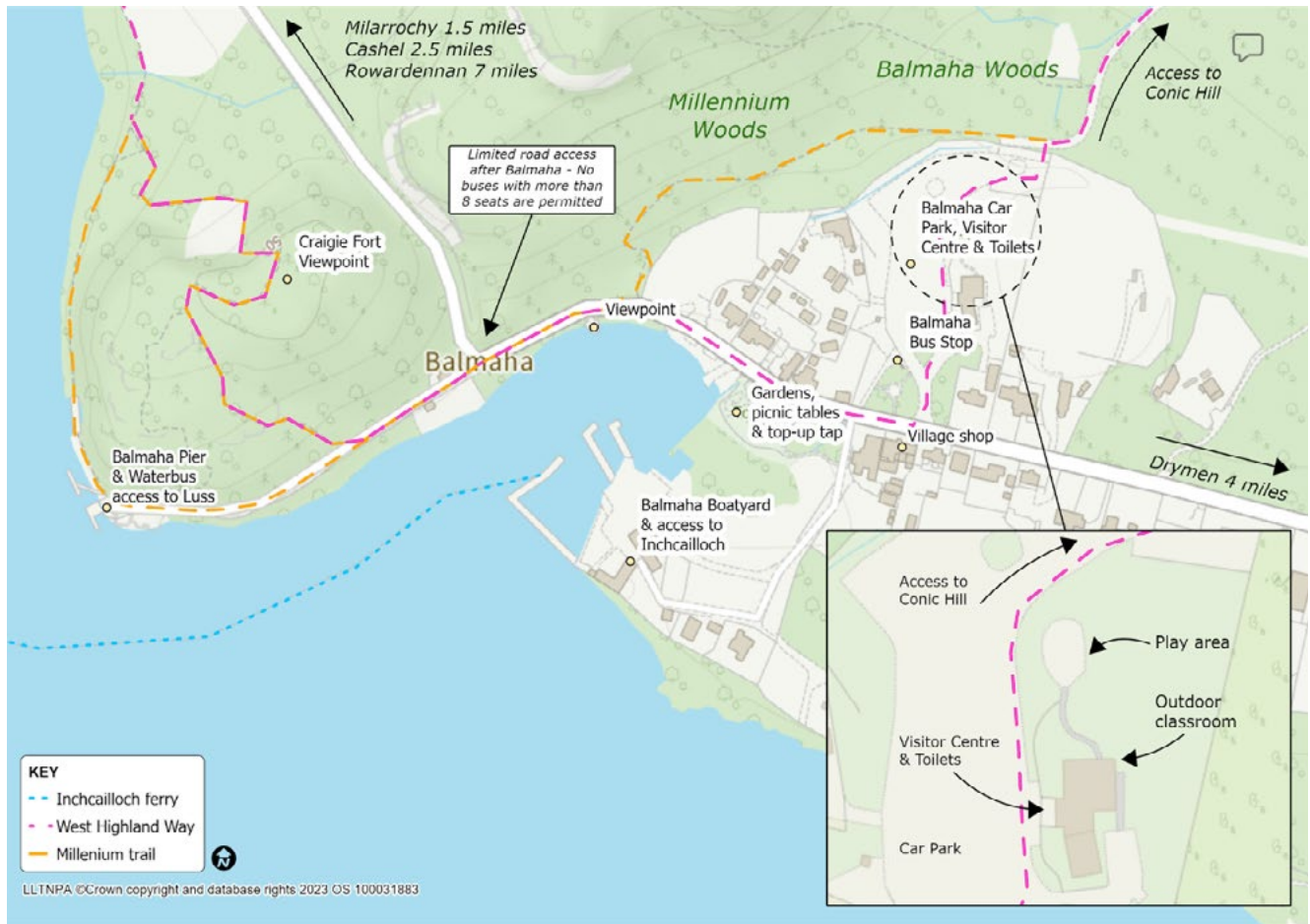
There is a village shop, a coffee shop, and a restaurant in the village. There are bins in the main car park, and Scottish Water have installed a Top Up Tap in the village as well, so we are encouraging you to ditch the disposables and ask your group to bring reusable water bottles on the day of the visit. Find out more about [Balmaha](#) on our website.



Please read our
[General Guidance](#)
before your visit

**We hope you all have a
fantastic day discovering
and exploring the National
Park with your group.**

Location



Balmaha Visitor Centre

Information about the National Park Visitor Centre is available on our [website](#).

Facilities

The National Park Visitor Centre has an interpretive exhibition with display panels explaining more about the National Park as well as what makes Balmaha a unique place to visit, including the natural and cultural heritage, the geology of the landscape formation and the Highland Boundary Fault. These have been translated into the following languages: Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, Hindi, Italian, Punjabi and Urdu.

There is a Ranger Service team based at the Visitor Centre and Rangers will be on hand to answer any questions you may have.

There is a small indoor space (20 persons) that shows short films and a covered outdoor classroom with bench seating suitable for small groups. Adjacent to the Visitor Centre is a small play park, willow tunnel, and a small number of picnic benches.

If you are aiming to use the National Park Visitor Centre for any aspect of the visit we can advise if any other schools or groups are booked in with the National Park Ranger Service on the day of your proposed visit, and how to avoid it being too busy. We can also assist with information if you are considering a pre-visit site check.

Toilet access, costs and accessibility

There are public toilets at the Visitor Centre. Please note there is a 50p charge for using the toilets: standard toilet payment is card only and the accessible toilet payment is coin only.

To arrange free access to the toilet facilities during your self-led visit, it is vital that you liaise with the Education and Inclusion team education@lochlomond-trossachs.org a minimum of two weeks prior to your visit.

On arrival at Balmaha Visitor Centre, please introduce yourself to the Rangers working that day who will be aware of your visit and access requirements.

Shorter notice means we cannot guarantee sufficient staff availability to assist access, so please be prepared to have a back-up plan for paying. Please also note that due to unforeseen circumstances, we may occasionally still be unable to support free access for reasons that are unplanned or out with our control.

There is an [Accessibility Statement](#) for the National Park Centre in Balmaha that you can view on our website.



Opening times

The Visitor Centre is open at the following times throughout the year

April to October:
open 7 days a week
9:30 – 5.00pm

November to March:
open weekends
9:30 – 4.00pm

Additional Resources

Walking routes

Walking route card for the [Millennium Forest Trail](#).

Accessible walking routes

There is a short walk that follows the pavement alongside the road by the main car park. It travels past Tom Weir gardens with a variety of seating and interpretation, and along Pier Road ending at the pier. There is an accessible viewing platform at Balmaha Bay overlooking the boat moorings.

Inchcailloch

Inchcailloch is part of the Loch Lomond National Nature Reserve and is a wonderful place to visit due to its rich natural and cultural heritage. It is the perfect place to experience remoteness and wildness in a safe and easily accessible location. The island is accessed by a short ferry crossing from the boatyard at Balmaha. It is advised to [contact the boatyard](#) ahead of the planned visit for up to date access information.

More information about Inchcailloch is available on our [website](#) and we have created the [Guide to Inchcailloch](#) for teachers and group leaders.



Educational resources

Balmaha is a great outdoor learning location in the National Park and can support visits on a variety of topics and themes, including:

Geography - land use, geology, glacial landscapes and field sketching, visitor management and sustainable tourism, forestry, and farming.

Climate and Nature - Scotland's atlantic rainforest, citizen Science surveys, woodlands, red squirrels, variety of birdlife and wildflowers.

Health and Wellbeing – variety of walking routes to suit different abilities, access to the beach and loch shore, mindfulness, and nature connections.

The National Park website has education resources and information to support your outdoor learning visit to Balmaha.

➤ [National Park general education resources](#)

➤ [The unique geology of Balmaha](#)

On the day

Please follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code during your visit, respect the National Park, the residents, wildlife, and other visitors enjoying their day. Dispose of your litter responsibly and recycle your waste whenever possible.

Enjoy Scotland's outdoors responsibly



**KNOW THE CODE
BEFORE YOU GO**

outdooraccess-scotland.com

Everyone has the right to be on most land and inland water providing they act responsibly. Your access rights and responsibilities are explained fully in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Whether you're in the outdoors or managing the outdoors, the key things are to:

- **take responsibility for your own actions**
- **respect the interests of other people**
- **care for the environment.**

Visit outdooraccess-scotland.com or contact your local Scottish Natural Heritage office.



Check weather forecasts and traffic reports for up-to-date travel disruption due to weather or other unplanned incidents.



Remind everyone of the key points of your Risk Assessment before undertaking the activities.



TICK SAFETY



During the spring and summer months, highlight the possibility of getting a tick bite. Include the following advice:

- Stick to paths. Ticks live in tall grasses, shrubs, bushes and trees branches up to waist height, and attach themselves to you as you brush past.
- Keep your arms and legs covered. If possible, tuck trousers into socks.
- Ticks stand out on light-coloured fabrics, use a lint roller on trousers and tops to remove small ticks.
- Good quality insect repellent can reduce the incidence of tick bites
- Check clothes and skin carefully– in springtime ticks are tiny, but more easily spotted in summer

It is important to check for ticks during the session, but also remind your group to check after the visit as well, as they can very small and difficult to see on clothing. They prefer creased areas like the armpit, groin and back of the knee.

If you discover a tick:

- Fortunately, they are easy to remove – use a tick remover or sharp tweezers and pull it straight out anti-clockwise. DO NOT squeeze the body of the tick
- Make sure you remove all of the mouthparts.
- Removing ticks as soon as possible reduces the risk of infection
- The most obvious symptom of Lyme disease is the 'Bull's Eye' rash, a red ring-shaped rash spreading from the site of the bite. It appears 2 – 40 days after infection and is the only sure-fire symptom of the disease. You may also experience flu like symptoms.
- If you think you may have caught Lyme disease, see your GP straight away.

Draft Itinerary for self-led visit to Balmaha

This suggested itinerary may help plan your day, including how long you have for walks as well as activity duration and lunch breaks. Walking the Millennium trail (circular route from Balmaha Visitor Centre to Craigie Fort viewpoint) can take over an hour depending on how many stops you take. Please just amend the table below to suit your plans.

TIME (adjust to suit travel arrangements for your school or group)	ACTIVITY (adjust to suit plans for the visit and focus for the day)
10.00 – 10.30 Arrival and orientation	<p>Arrive at Balmaha Visitor Centre: Balmaha, Glasgow G63 0JQ</p> <p>Comfort Break/Introductions to the day</p> <p>Divide the group into two equal groups (if needed based on group size – retain a 1 Leader to 15 participant ratio) with a teacher/ group leader allocated to each group</p> <p>We suggest walking the Millennium trail with the groups – perhaps choosing different activity locations for the separate groups.</p>
10.30 – 12.00 Group activities	<p>Group 1 – Activity one</p> <p>Group 2 – Activity two</p>
12.00 – 12.30 Lunch Break	Options include back at the Visitor Centre with picnic benches at the back of the willow dome, the outdoor classroom, Tom Weirs Gardens, on the beach etc. There is a small shop in village which has limits on numbers of children and young people entering at one time.
12.30 – 2.00 Group activities	<p>Group 1 - Activity two</p> <p>Group 2 – Activity one</p>
2.00 – 2.15 Conclusion/Departure	Dependant on your return journey time, and when the group need to be back at your starting location for homeward transport.

Please note: All times are approximate and depend upon arrival time, weather conditions and pace of walking.

After your visit

We welcome any feedback you may have on our resources so we can continue to improve our support for groups in the future. Email your feedback to: education@lochlomond-trossachs.org

Why not share photos from your day on our social media pages?

