



Get away for... **THE WEEKEND!**

Don't just pass through on the way further north,
take the time to explore Tyndrum

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Carol Kubicki

Huddled where the River Fillan cuts its way through steep-sided mountains that soar to almost 1,000m is the village of Tyndrum (pronounced Tine-drum). Competing for space with the railway and the main road to Fort William and Oban, the buildings of this small village stretch like bunting on either side of the road.

Anyone bound for the drama of Glencoe in the Scottish Highlands will pass through Tyndrum and many tourists use the local amenities, including The Green Welly Stop, a family-owned petrol station, restaurant and shopping emporium that is Tyndrum's best-known landmark.

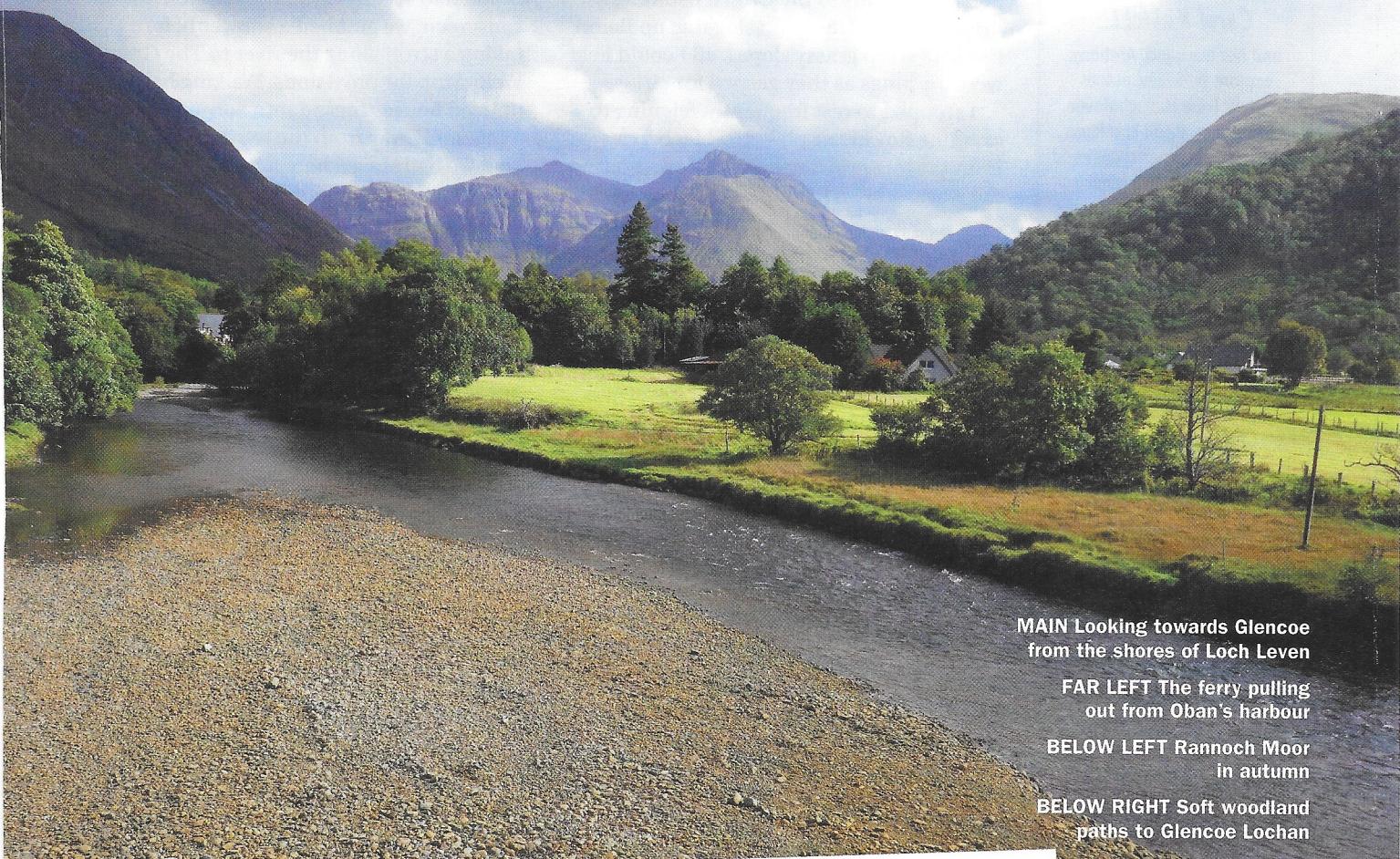
Having briefly stopped in Tyndrum time and again, we wanted to try it as a destination, so booked three nights at the romantically named By The Way campsite on the edge of the village. Leaving home early, we negotiated the motorways and slowed our pace by Loch Lomond, pulling in at the Falls of Falloch car park.

Dorothy and William Wordsworth travelled this way in 1803 and a poetic quote from Dorothy displayed on the viewing platform describes the thundering of the falls, '...as if from the heart of the earth, the sound of torrents ascending out of the long hollow glen'.

Just short of Tyndrum we parked at Dalrigh to stretch our legs in Tyndrum's Community Woodland, planted with native trees in 2000. At a stone bridge we scoured the river for signs of dippers, breathed in the sweet air as we meandered along trails through flourishing trees and embraced the mountain panoramas. We smiled at each other in shared contentment, happy to be back in Scotland.

With sunshine forecast the next day, we left our 'van at the site, crossed the adjacent railway line and climbed through the forest towards Cononish. Our track's verges were draped extravagantly with autumnal spiders' webs that dripped with glistening dew. ▶

Why?... Spend a few nights in Tyndrum and you will realise there is more to this village than just a service station on the way to the Highlands

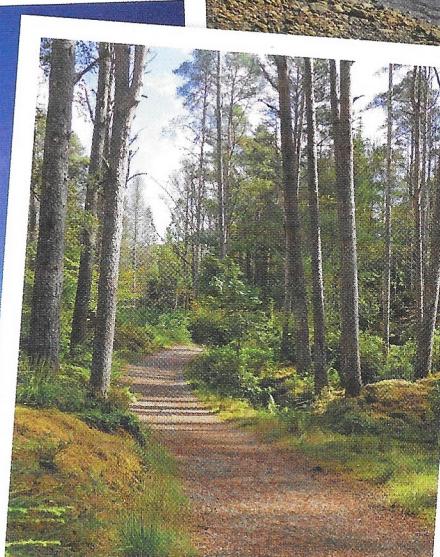
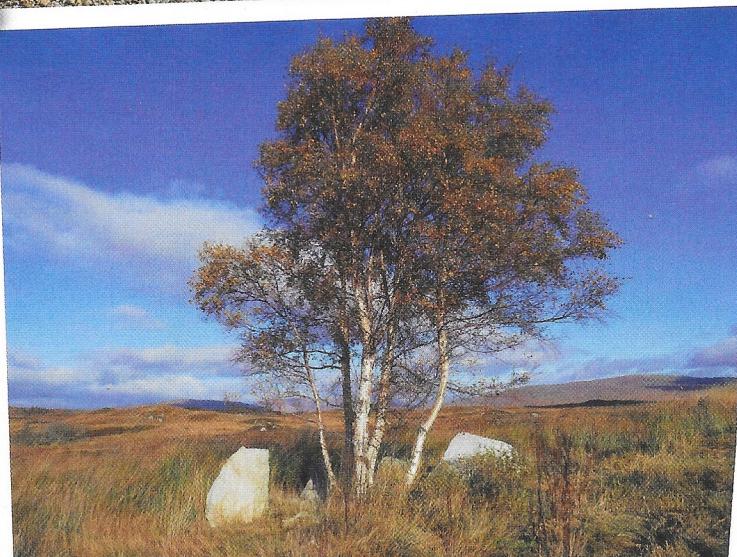


MAIN Looking towards Glencoe from the shores of Loch Leven

FAR LEFT The ferry pulling out from Oban's harbour

BELOW LEFT Rannoch Moor in autumn

BELOW RIGHT Soft woodland paths to Glencoe Lochan



US AND OUR 'VAN



Carol Kubicki...

and her husband, Anthony, explore beautiful places in their Blue Bus whatever the season. Carol is a keen walker, fair-weather cyclist and improving birdwatcher



A 2021 Devon Firefly on a SWB Ford Custom Transit. This is our third Devon campervan and we love the layout that packs so much into a sub-five-metre van

Emerging from the shadowy forestry into the dazzling light of the open glen, the towering elegance of Ben Lui loomed ahead and to its right our destination, Beinn Chuirn, a mountain just short of 900m high.

As we followed the winding river, we could make out the buildings of the Cononish Gold and Silver Mine on the slopes of Beinn Chuirn. There is apparently gold in these hills and permits can be purchased to pan for gold in the community woodland, but any lucky labourers have to hand their finds to the Crown Estate.

Leaving the track and slogging up Beinn Chuirn's steep grassy slopes, all I could hear were my lungs as they gasped for air!

I stopped to rest frequently, feigning to examine flowers or pick ripe blaeberrys from the low-growing bushes. Appreciating the warm sun on my skin, I counted my blessings as I plodded upwards through rocky outcrops. The ceaseless blue sky seemed vast and the light accentuated every line on the mountain, giving the grass and stones a steely edge. Looking beyond Beinn Chuirn, this clarity diminished and the distant hills shimmered blue in the haze.

At the summit we spun around, taking in the views of mountains layered behind mountains, behind more mountains. We tried to pick out anything familiar: Ben More and the Crianlarich Hills were easy to

spot and, to the north peering over everything, we could see the bump of a fuzzy Ben Nevis.

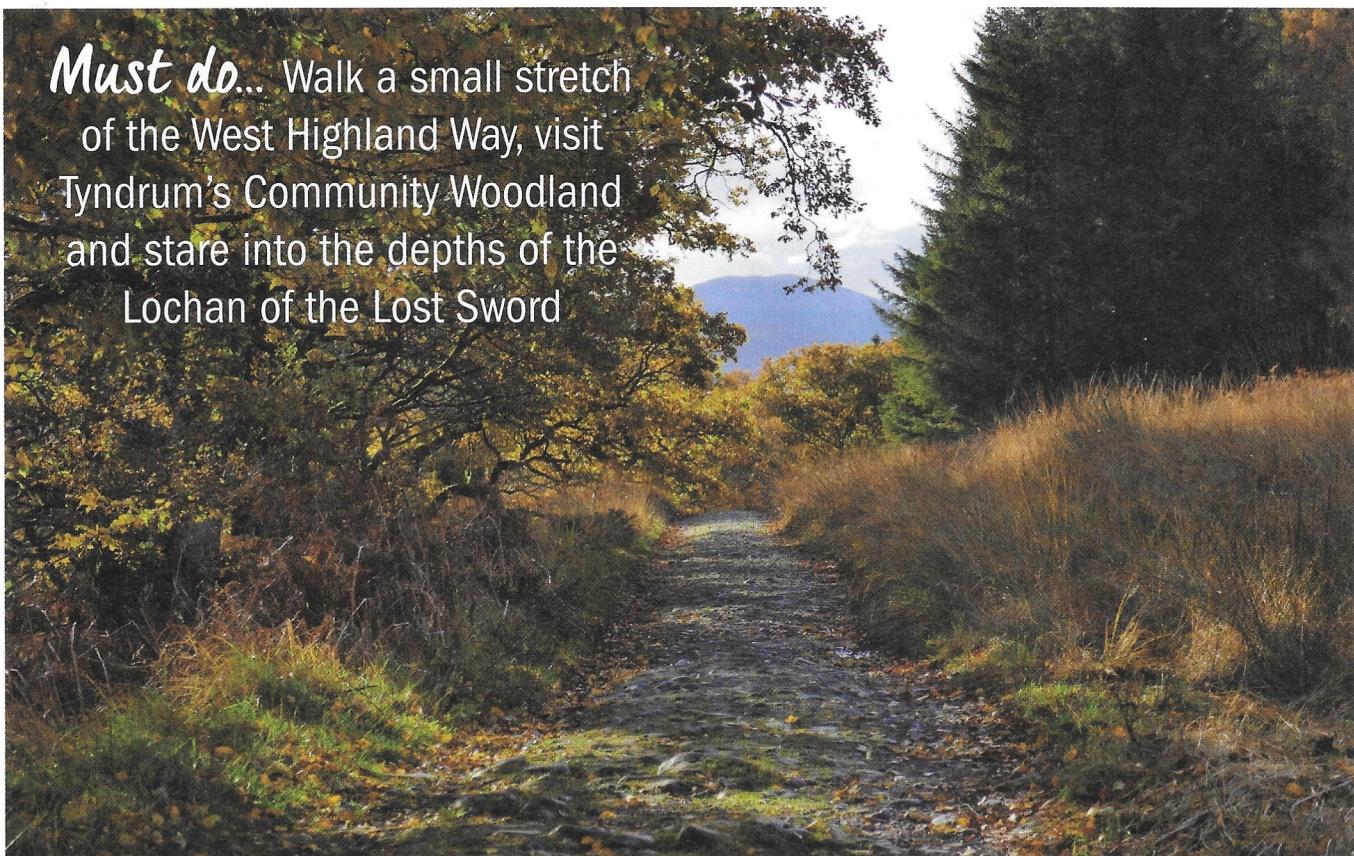
Back at the site a new tranche of West Highland Way backpackers had arrived and erected their tents. They were also elated after such fine weather and hung around in groups chatting about kit and mileage. The popular West Highland Way stretches 96 miles from Milngavie on the outskirts of Glasgow to Fort William, via Tyndrum and some of Scotland's most beautiful scenery.

Keen to scrub off the sweat and sunscreen, we grabbed a shower before taking a stroll along the river to The Green Welly Stop for provisions. Walking back, I noticed houses tucked into corners of Tyndrum, away from the tourist drag. I was glad we had stayed here a few days and had the chance to see Tyndrum as a community and not just a handy stop.

The following day called for something easier and, catching the bus south to nearby Crianlarich, we climbed forest trails that took us to the West Highland Way and a straightforward route back to Tyndrum. In newly cleared forestry where the rich, earthy smell of cut wood hung heavily in the muggy air, we joined the straggle of long-distance hikers laden with heavy rucksacks.

The path narrowed through mixed woodland and was lined with flowers and

Must do... Walk a small stretch of the West Highland Way, visit Tyndrum's Community Woodland and stare into the depths of the Lochan of the Lost Sword



heather as it wound down to a tumbling stream. We stopped to eat with a view of the mountains above Crianlarich, watching low clouds hovering over the summits while smears of sunlight lit up the hillsides.

Crossing the meandering River Fillan, we skirted the Hill and Mountain Research Centre, where numerous boards had information about the wildlife, habitats and farming. At the ruins of St Fillan's Priory, we read the memorials on stones in the old cemetery and dreamed up stories about these past lives. Later we followed signs for a holy pool, a naturally deep stretch of the river that was once separated into male and female areas for ritual bathing and healing.

Reaching Dalrigh, we were on familiar ground in the community forest and could see Beinn Chuirn with the gold mine on its flanks. An information board marks the site of the Battle of Dalrigh in 1306.

King Robert the Bruce and his battle-weary army were ambushed here and defeated by Clan MacDougall. The victorious MacDougalls reputedly took a brooch torn from the king's cloak as booty and Robert the Bruce took flight with his surviving soldiers.

A legend tells that, before running, they hurled their swords into the nearby Lochan of the Lost Sword. Looking over the lochan, we agreed that ditching your sword when

you're a fugitive seemed unlikely and there is no evidence to back up this tale.

In brightening afternoon weather, we took our van across the watery expanse of Rannoch Moor and through lowering Glencoe. From Glencoe, a favourite stroll along soft woodland paths led us to a green lochan above the village where shadowy mountains reflected in the still water. From the shores of Loch Leven we watched the sun begin its flamboyant descent and as we drove back the light accentuated every crease and dimple on the west-facing mountain slopes before the shadows settled.

Getting away early the next morning, we headed for Oban. Breathing in along the narrow road from Oban to Gallanach, we grabbed the last parking spot near the ferry crossing to the Isle of Kerrera.

The ferryman was organising the foot passengers and it was good that we had a 15-minute wait as he explained that bookings now had to be online. This was technology overkill for a five-minute voyage across the Sound of Kerrera that costs less than a coffee but we dutifully logged on and filled in the boxes with our names, address and even dates of birth!

Tickets purchased, I chatted to the ferryman and sympathised about the aggravation this new policy must cause. He laughed wryly, "A biscuit tin and a book of ▶

ESSENTIALS

HOW LONG

Three nights

WHEN

We visited in September

HOW MUCH

Fuel Average 40mpg from Morecambe to Tyndrum and Glencoe, returning via Oban 590 miles £103

Site fees £78

Entrance fees Two adults: Dunollie Castle £15

Public transport Two adults:

Kerrera ferry and single fares for bus (Tyndrum to Crianlarich) £16.40

TOTAL £212.40



BELOW FAR LEFT Autumnal colours on the West Highland Way

BELOW Distant mountains shimmered blue in the haze

INFORMATION

Walkhighlands has strolls to mountain hikes – download the app for your phone

 walkhighlands.co.uk

More information on the West Highland Way

 westhighlandway.org

Strathfillan Community Development Trust has information about Tyndrum's Community Woodland and gold panning

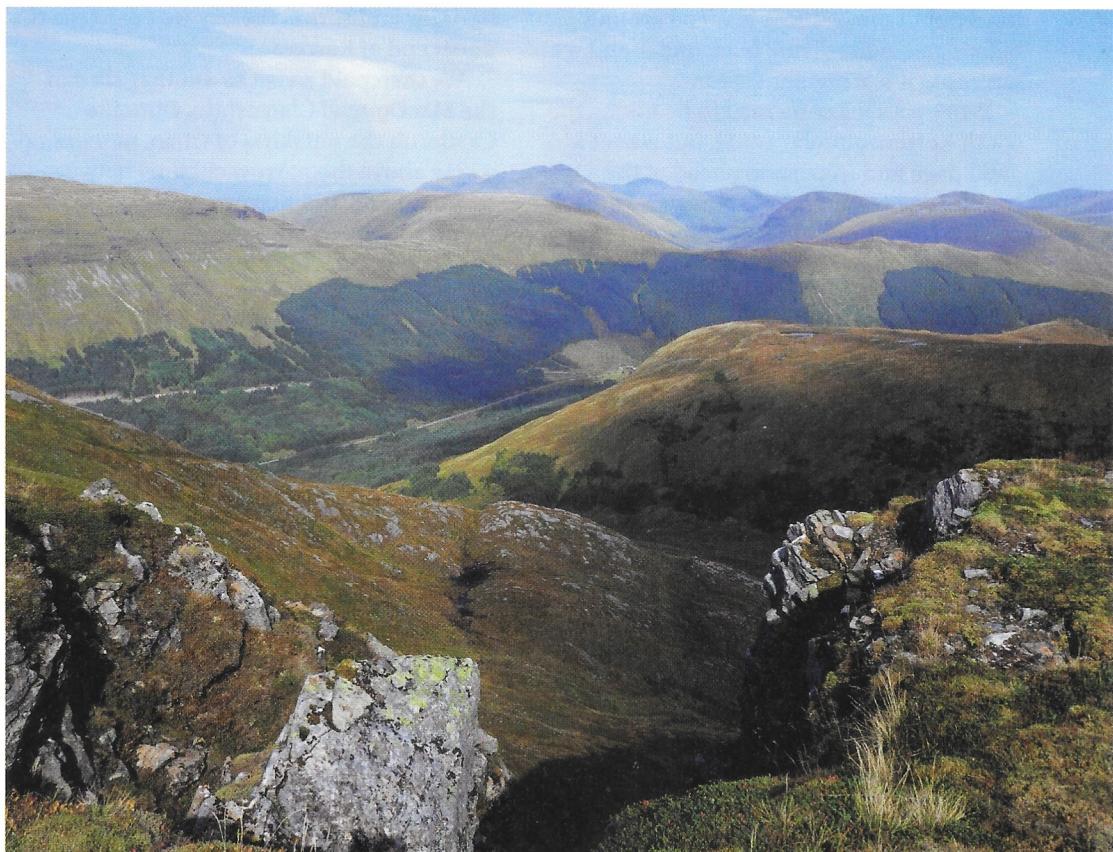
 strathfillancdt.org.uk/home

TOP TIPS

You will hear trains at By The Way campsite, but these are infrequent and don't run through the night

Parking for the Isle of Kerrera ferry is limited and unsuitable for large motorhomes.

Staying at nearby Oban Holiday Park is a good option; or it is about an hour's walk from Oban or a short taxi ride





Must see... A Scottish castle: Both Dunollie Castle and Gylen Castle have dramatic coastal positions and fantastic views

lottery tickets is all we really need here.”

Arriving on Kerrera, where over 60 people live, many of them sheep and cattle farmers, I was delighted to see an otter popping its head out of the water. It glanced around before gracefully diving back under and we were told it is a regular visitor.

Every passenger seemed to be hiking the south Kerrera circular route, but we set a good pace and were soon ahead of the trailing day-trippers. From the descriptively named Little Horseshoe Bay, undulating tracks and paths took us to the grassy slopes and cliffs below Gylen Castle.

The restored tower of this MacDougall castle (the clan we had met at Dalrigh) stands high on a promontory overlooking two pebbly bays and has wide views to the Isle of Seil in the south and across to Mull.

This craggy coastline dotted with old sea stacks was attractive and we lingered before the path turned inland through rough fields strewn with bracken. After a farm, we were surprised to see swallows still here, swooping over the grass finding insects, while we perched on the stone walls of ruined buildings munching snacks.

Near the road back to the ferry we stumbled upon Balliemore Farm's blue shed that was packed with local goodies, from chocolate to woolly hats. We browsed the crafts and left some cash in the honesty box.

Back in Oban we needed coffee and Hinba Coffee Roasters, a local business, came up trumps. From the tables outside this café, we watched the boats in the harbour and across the bay we could see the north end of Kerrera.

We then paid a visit to another slice of the MacDougall Clan estate. Dunollie Castle, on the outskirts of Oban, perches on a crag above the narrow channel between the mainland and Kerrera.

We paid our admission and explored the compact ruins while the sonorous notes of a piper seeped through the trees. The view to Kerrera is unrivalled and watching the ferries sailing below us was mesmerising.

Stories tell that, after the Battle of Dalrigh, the MacDougalls hid the appropriated brooch belonging to King Robert the Bruce at Dunollie and later at Gylen Castle. Although experts now agree the brooch is no older than the sixteenth century, so couldn't have belonged to Bruce, it remains a fine piece of Highland art.

After exploring the woodland faerie garden, we admired an intricately carved raven that rose from the remains of a lightning-struck tree. The raven is the MacDougall clan symbol and reflects their Norse heritage. Then, sitting on a bench in the castle's garden with refreshing cups of tea, we prepared to hit the road home... **mmm**

ABOVE Gylen Castle on Kerrera commands wide views

B BELOW By The Way Hostel and Campsite, Tyndrum



THE CAMPsite

By The Way Hostel and Campsite, Lower Station Road, Tyndrum, FK20 8RY
 ☎ 01838 400333
 🌐 tyndrumbytheway.com
 📅 29 March - 31 October
 £ Two adults, pitch and electric: From £28