

# True North Outdoor *the spirit of adventure*

Wilderness Adventures by Canoe



## Glenfinnan and the Shiel watershed

This classic journey traces Bonnie Prince Charlie's return to Scotland in 1745+ to lead the Jacobite rebellion via Loch Shiel, the river Shiel, and Loch Moidart. The wild scenery gives a huge variety of terrain along the trip from the hills at the Loch's head, the wide expanse at the loch's outlet, and the coastal foreshore. The visitor centre at Glenfinnan allows the voyageur to gain all the information about the area that they might need on local and natural history and really sets the scene before the journey begins. At the Loch's head a monument to Bonnie Prince Charlie comprising of a tall, narrow column complete with spiral staircase topped with the highlander's statue gazes down the length of the imposing glen. As the hills surrounding the Glen fail to reach the heights required of Munro status they are less well travelled and the loch offers isolation and calm.

The fantastic scenery and isolation has attracted filmmakers and the Loch has been used as the backdrop to 'Hogwarts' in the Harry Potter films and 'The Master of Ballantyne' with Errol Flynn. In the film 'Highlander', the loch stars as the fictional birthplace of Duncan McLeod.

The first 2 days follow this lonely "V" shaped valley where the steep sides continue down through the black waters for another 380 feet. The banks are partly wooded and the air is filled with the sound of mountain streams rushing down from the rugged crags above. Sandy beaches provide campsites along the way. Much of the shoreline is designated as a Special Area of Conservation and wildlife such as deer and eagles can sometimes be seen. It was on Loch Shiel that the natural history writer Mike Tomkies set up his home called Wildernesse and wrote classic books such as *A Last Wild Place* and *My Wilderness Wildcats*.

At the southern end the loch narrows considerably and gives an impression of a gateway almost sealing off the hidden glen. Here on an island an ancient burial ground is well worth a visit to see the ruined church with its altar still intact and a small brass bell. The island is said to be haunted and a number of spooky occurrences continue to add to its reputation.

Then as the loch bends to the west leaving the brooding glen behind, the atmosphere lifts as the view opens out on rolling hills. Almost imperceptibly the loch becomes a river with waving eel grass showing a flow. The river Shiel flows gracefully through beautiful countryside and ends in a short rush down the chute of the tidal shelf into Loch Moidart.

This picturesque sea loch has a number of coves and islands on one of which Tioram Castle stands dominating the narrows to Kinlochmoidart. The kelp beds round Eilean Shona are populated with seals and sea otters. This island stands like a chock-stone protecting this natural harbour and was the summer holiday retreat for JM Barrie who wrote a screenplay for the 1924 adaptation of his Peter Pan novel. In calm weather a short excursion round Shona gives the voyageur an awesome view of the open sea. And so the journey ends with a view of the islands of Muck, Rum and Eigg against the massive backdrop of the Atlantic Ocean.