

The Beginning...

Ben Nevis began to form around 500 million years ago when two huge plates in the earth's crust collided. This started off a mountain building period which created the Caledonian Mountain Chain. These mountains would have been similar in size to the present day Andean chain. During this time great heat and pressure were produced which melted and changed the underlying rock. This molten rock (magma) escaped to the surface and erupted as lava flowing into the area around Ben Nevis. There was also a lot of movement of magma taking place below the earth's surface which later cooled and created the outer granite. This process reoccurred later which resulted in the inner granite being formed. Throughout this time layers of lava and ash had been building up on the surface and had become so heavy they collapsed into the still molten inner granite which caused a huge eruption. Over a long period of time the area cooled and then the ice moved across the land. During the last two million years erosion by ice and water has removed at least 1 km of rock and exposed the inner granite forming the landscape as you see it today with its valleys, glens, cliffs and corries.

After the ice retreated, plant life returned and as it got progressively warmer species like birch and Scott's pine moved in.

Back then...

Since that time probably the biggest period of change has been since the Victorians to the present day. There is evidence of human settlements in the area throughout the ages but these did not alter the landscape to any great extent. We do have the Gaelic language to thank for the mountain's name. It was usually a spoken rather than written language and later when the area was mapped the name lost some of its original meaning. The Gaelic form of the name is *Beinn Nibheis* and it has been linked to various Gaelic and Irish words including '*neamhaise*' meaning terrible and '*neimheil*' meaning poisonous. Probably the closest explanation of the word is venomous. So maybe from these interpretations you may gain an insight into the nature of the mountain.

During Victorian times it became fashionable to explore remote areas. With the opening of the observatory on the summit in 1883 and the building of the bridle path, Ben Nevis became a popular destination. In fact it became so popular that the bridle path became known as the 'Tourist Path' and a hotel was built on the summit. Permits had to be obtained to climb the hill and walkers were charged one shilling.

And Today...

Its popularity has grown and grown and today we have visitors numbering in the hundred thousands. This ever-increasing pressure on the fragile environment has had an obvious and detrimental effect on the landscape. The toll of thousands of pairs of feet every year on the thin turf leads to it being worn away and that coupled with the high rainfall often leaves scars of erosion on the mountainside. To counteract this, continuous work is being carried out on the main path to provide a good walking surface which helps contain the problem. You can help by sticking to the path and not following any 'shortcuts'. Other problems which arise are litter and human waste.

You can help to minimise the impact on the mountain by acting responsibly:

- Take your litter and food scraps off the hill with you.
- If you need to urinate, do so at least 30m from streams and burns.
- If you need to defecate, do so as far away as possible from buildings, streams and farm animals. Bury faeces in a shallow hole and replace the turf.
- Please bag sanitary waste and bring it off the hill. Dispose of it in the proper manner.
- Do not use the summit emergency shelter as a toilet or camping area.
- Do not build cairns or leave artificial objects.

Please help us to keep Ben Nevis
litter and waste free ...

Remember ... Leave No Trace

Na fàg dad - as do dheidh



Plants and Animals

Ben Nevis has some interesting and unusual wildlife especially considering its hostile environment. The lower slopes are covered in grassland and heath vegetation. The meadow pipit *Shàlhbhag* can be found in this type of habitat although it will move to more hospitable areas in winter. Wheatears *Brù-Gheal* and the ring ouzel *Dubb-Chreige* are frequently sighted summer visitors too. It is not uncommon to see small lizards basking on rocks in sunny weather and you may see voles scuttling through the tussocky grasses. The Stonechat *Clacharanca* can often be seen searching for insects around the rough open ground.



As you continue onto the higher slopes of the mountain less common arctic alpine plants may be seen. These include the alpine lady's mantle, yellow mountain saxifrage and golden saxifrage. The name saxifrage comes from two Latin words meaning 'rock breaker', because it was once believed they could break open the rocks. When, in fact, their long tough roots are used as anchors to grip tightly into cracks in the stone. The Ptarmigan *Càrnachan* is a hardy mountain bird similar to a grouse, but can be identified by its white wings.

It is often difficult to see as it seems to vanish into the

landscape. In winter it turns completely white and during the summer it is a mottled brown. Mosses are found on most parts of the mountain indicating waterlogged, peaty soil beneath the surface. This type of soil is poor in nutrients and few plants survive, bog plants such as sundew and butterwort capture and digest insects in order to live. Vegetation cover begins to recede at 900m and the summit is a bare rocky plateau, although even here plant life clings on in the form of lichens growing on the boulders.



Welcome

Whether you are here to scale its summit, admire its views, or learn about its geology and history, this leaflet will provide you with an enjoyable and informative look at the mountain and the track to its summit.



WALKING THE BEN NEVIS MOUNTAIN TRACK



Summit 1344m

Carn Dearg
1221m



Five Finger Gully Area



Ben Burn
AFT to Achintee



Follow the path
to the summit

← To the CIC Hut and the North Face



West an t-Saiche
711m

The footpath was constructed during the summer of 1883. The work was carried out by a local contractor named James MacLean and the last rise before the summit is named MacLean's Steep after him. The total cost was around £800 for the whole path. It was originally built as a supply route so that ponies could carry essential provisions to the men working in the observatory. The observatory was built to obtain records of weather conditions at height so that they could be compared with other results taken at sea level. Hourly readings had to be taken in all types of weather. The men often had to dig themselves and the equipment out of snowdrifts and sometimes it was necessary to rope themselves together during high winds or ice. The observatory stayed open for almost twenty-one years, eventually closing due to a lack of funds.

Youth Hostel



Ben Nevis Inn,
P Achintee

Glen Nevis Visitor Centre
(only public toilets in Glen Nevis)

Although Ben Nevis is seen as a challenge by many, it is also home to a variety of birds and animals. Over the years, there have been various, often unexpected, sightings of animals. The observatory staff noted that it was common to see stoats and weasels on the summit and in the early 1970s a badger was seen by climbers. More recently there have been reports of pine martens. Ravens are often seen performing their aerial acrobatics above the tops and the hardy little snow buntings nest high up. Buzzards are a fairly common site circling on the air currents and kestrels can also be seen hovering over the hillsides as they hunt for food.

For further information contact: www.nevispartnership.co.uk