

Let's blaze a trail



PARK LIFE Loch Lomond & Trossachs

PARK UP FOR TOP AWARD

One of Scotland's two national parks, Loch Lomond & The Trossachs, has been shortlisted for National Park of the Year 2017.

It is one of five finalists chosen by experts for BBC's Countryfile Magazine and was chosen by Countryfile host John Craven.

Gordon Watson, chief executive of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, said: "We are honoured to be shortlisted."

The winners will be decided by public vote. Voting is open until February 28, 2017 at www.countryfile.com/awards

MOUNTAIN HIGHLIGHTS

The Fort William Mountain Festival is back for the ninth year this week.

World-class athletes, speakers and films will be showcased from February 15 to 19. It kicks off with a torchlight procession.

There are two studio nights, a series of workshops, fringe events and an Art Fest. The festival is also has a film competition that showcases mountain culture.

The festival takes place at various locations across Fort William and Nevis Range.

■ www.mountainfestival.co.uk

GEAR OF THE WEEK

Mountain Hardwear StretchDown Hooded Jacket Mountain Hardwear's new hooded jacket includes a stretch-welded channel construction to offer excellent insulation.

The construction of the jacket allows it to trap more warmth, while the light stretch-knit fabric offers good comfort levels. It also has water-resistant

Q.Shield Down 750-fill, so the wearer will still be warm even if it's wet. It weighs 438g to 540g and is aimed at general winter wear, hiking and skiing.

See www.mountainhardwear.com and look online for sales. Priced around £200.



LOTS TO SEA

Take in the Dunbar coastline on The John Muir Way



FIONA RUSSELL

With spring just around the corner, it's the perfect time to start planning a trip along one of Scotland's Great Trails to immerse yourself in stunning scenery and wildlife and keep fit in the process

The John Muir Way has been officially recognised as one of Scotland's Great Trails.

The 134-mile route, which crosses Scotland from coast to coast, joins a stable of 27 other celebrated Great Trails, including the West Highland Way. It is the 28th long-distance route to be given the accolade by Scottish Natural Heritage.

Since its launch in April 2014, the route has become the focus for many thousands of walkers and cyclists. It starts in Dunbar, East Lothian – celebrated as Muir's birthplace – and extends across the country to Helensburgh in the west.

It takes in castles, historic towns and villages, coastal scenery and Scotland's first national park, Loch Lomond and The Trossachs.

The route also passes some great attractions, such as the famous bridges across the Firth of Forth and the iconic Falkirk Wheel. The John Muir Way takes an average of 12 days to walk, while some people cycle it in a few days.

■ See johnmuirway.org
The best of Scotland's Great Trails

Here's a selection of walking trails in Scotland, including my top picks.

■ Coastal Trails

If you love stunning seascapes, sand dunes, seabirds and salty sea air, you will enjoy the Ayrshire Coastal Path, Berwickshire Coastal Path, the Kintyre Way, Moray Coast Trail, the West Island Way and, my pick, the Fife Coastal Path.

Stretching for 117 miles from the Firth of Forth to the Firth of



HIGHLIGHT Falkirk Wheel connects Forth and Clyde Canal with Union Canal

Tay, it boasts beautiful sea views, stunning beaches and many pretty fishing villages. See www.fifecoastalpath.co.uk

■ Source to Sea routes

Follow some of Scotland's big rivers to the coast, including the Annandale Way, the Clyde Walkway, the Speyside Way and, my pick, the River Ayr Way.

Trace the river for 40 miles from its source at Glenbucket to the sea in the town of Ayr. It offers a variety of landscapes, including moorland, woodland, rocky gorges, farmland and an area rich in industrial history.

See www.walkhighlands.co.uk/glasgow/river-ayr-way.shtml

■ Footsteps through history Take a journey back in time on Scottish historical trails including the Catheran Trail, Rob Roy Way and St Cuthbert's Way.

It's hard to choose one but the Borders Abbeys Way is a superb route of 64.5 miles and divided into five sections of roughly equal distances. It can be walked clockwise or anti-clockwise

starting at any of the Border towns of Kelso, Jedburgh, Hawick, Selkirk or Melrose. See bordersabbeyway.com

■ Mountains and lochs

There are plenty of trails to choose from, such as the Kintyre Way, the West Island Way and the West Highland Way.

One of my favourites is the Great Glen Way, which runs from Fort William to Inverness along the Great Glen Faultline. The route is 73 miles and closely follows the line of the Caledonian Canal. See www.greatglenway.org

■ The originals

There have been long distance walks mapped out for decades and if there's one route that is a must-do in Scotland, it's the West Highland Way.

Extending 96 miles from Milngavie to Fort William, it passes through a huge variety of landscapes and offers walkers a chance to experience the lowlands and highlands of Scotland. See www.west-highland-way.co.uk

Advice and ideas

Join me on my adventures in Scotland's great outdoors by checking out my award-winning website at www.fionaoutdoors.co.uk. You'll find lots of great information about walking, cycling, running and other outdoor activities, as well as kit reviews.