

# A match MADE in heaven

John Bateman finds contentment on a mini-tour of Scotland

The Club's Clachan site lies close to beautiful Loch Tay



**DON'T FORGET**  
You can book your pitch online at [caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook](http://caravanclub.co.uk/searchandbook), by calling our Advance Booking Service on 01342 327490 or, for AS sites, calling them direct.

## FAMILY FUN



**Traditional treat**  
The annual Braemar Gathering enjoys royal patronage and features sports, pipe bands, dancing and more. It is held on the first Saturday in September.

T 01339 755377  
W [braemargathering.org](http://braemargathering.org)

**Historic huts**  
The Scottish Crannog Centre gives visitors to Loch Tay the opportunity to see how ancient people built and lived in artificial island dwellings.

T 01887 830583  
W [crannog.co.uk](http://crannog.co.uk)

### HUT HERITAGE



Photo: PrettyKlicks

**Fairytale fun**  
Storybook Glen on Royal Deeside gives visitors the chance to discover nursery rhyme and fairytale characters in a magical land of trees, plants, animals and waterfalls.

T 01224 732941  
W [storybookglenaberdeen.co.uk](http://storybookglenaberdeen.co.uk)

**Ice skating**  
Forfar Indoor Sports offers ice-skating tuition and sessions for all ages and abilities as well as curling and bowling.

T 01307 468668  
W [forfarindoorsports.co.uk](http://forfarindoorsports.co.uk)



## THIS MONTH'S FEATURED SITES

- CLACHAN**  
See p274 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2011/12*
- BRAEMAR**  
See p250 of the *Directory*
- LOCHSIDE**  
See p252 of the *Directory*
- BALBIRNIE PARK**  
See p261 of the *Directory*



Clachan Club site

Scotland and touring are just made for each other. Peaks and lochs, vast purple moorlands and granite cities, unspoiled coastlines and rocky islands lure us onwards with a mix of ingredients offering all the mouth-watering promise of a Nigella Lawson sticky pudding. It is pretty good up here, even if it does rain a bit, and Club site locations capture the variety of the country in a way that makes tour-building easy. Last 'summer' I trundled around four sites on an

admittedly wild and soggy fortnight meander that linked the wooded hills of the Stirling-Perthshire border with the lofty magic of Aberdeenshire and the Cairngorms, before gently easing me down to the homely comforts and greenery of country parks in Angus and Fife. The sites - Clachan, Braemar, Lochside and Balbirmie Park - are as different as the regions themselves. My home, in south-west Scotland, makes Clachan and the village of Killin the nearest starting point, and here, where burns tumble down leafy hillsides

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# FOOD + DRINK

## Lovely spot

The Falls of Dochart Inn in Killin is a family-friendly hostelry enjoying a scenic setting and offering good, traditional fare.

T 01567 820270  
W falls-of-dochart-inn.co.uk



## TASTE TREAT



## Golf teas

Try Killin Golf Club for a sociable snack or three-course meal. Look out for discount golf tickets at the Maragowan Club site office.

T 01567 820312  
W killingolfclub.co.uk



## Local specialities

Braemar Lodge is just a short stroll from the Club site. Serving local produce, there is a fine choice of good-value meals.

T 01339 741627  
W braemarlodge.co.uk



## Dining choice

Midway between Forfar and Kirriemuir is The Drovers Inn. Offers a choice of a hearty meal by the fire or dining in the contemporary restaurant.

T 01307 860322  
W the-drovers.com

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Braemar is the second coldest low-lying place in the UK with a mean temperature of just 6.8°C



Stopping to take in the Braemar scene



Braemar Club site

into the valley-floor home of Loch Tay, and where black-water river powers its way in white-water cascades through the heart of the village, you are in holiday heaven. Walking, cycling, boating, fishing, golfing, climbing Ben Lawers or simply watching the hawks, marvelling at multi-coloured fungi or gazing at alpine flowers – the seasonal choice is immense and outdoor options match the best the country has to offer.

## RURAL HIDEAWAY

Clachan, a members-only site, mirrors its area's mood perfectly. It is a little gem, something of an anachronism to remind us of caravanning days past. Although electrics and hardstandings have been added to the rural hideaway I first chanced upon 20 years ago, the character of the site remains unchanged and generally nature is left to herself.

Clachan covers six acres set into untamed hill country and offers 45 pitches sited around a grassy central meadow or tucked away on discreet plateaux among the trees.

This is a site for quiet folk and quiet pursuits. The absence of a shower and toilet block helps keep it peaceful and most families with active children opt for the facilities and neighbouring amenities offered by the Maragowan Club site in the village, a mile away and where the wardens are based. If you and your dog like clambering challenging hillside tracks, backed by birdsong and the babble of an accompanying burn, then this, my friends, is for you. Head off site and you're in high-country solitude.

If Clachan has a drawback it is that there is no direct pathway to the village for shops, pubs, restaurants and waterfalls. It is possible to trek across country opposite the



Lochside Club site

site entrance, navigating your way to lochside tracks and castle ruins; otherwise it is a drive or road walk with no footpath.

It is, I think, a small price to pay for genuine rural escapism and, as the tour continues and you head alongside Loch Tay to Kenmore then beyond to Braemar, I wager you'll plan to return.

Braemar Club site, formerly The Invercauld, is one for all seasons. I have stayed there in glittering springtime, summer sunshine, heather-clad autumn and mid-winter snow and have never found this Deeside gateway to the Cairngorms anything other than magical.

## HIGH LIVING

You won't lack for comfort at this 97-pitch, nine-acre site. Here, you'll find all the goodies – 86 hardstandings, excellent shower/toilet facilities, laundry, Wi-Fi access, playground and, in the icy depths of winter, ski-racks, plus rooms for social occasions and drying the waterproofs.

It is an attractive site, in familiar Club-layout pattern, but the surrounding heights serve as a constant reminder that you are privileged to be somewhere very special.

Dog owners are well served with a decent on-site walk alongside woodland but, opposite the entrance, a well-defined

path climbs to open country and a major track. Here, your dog, intoxicated by wildlife scents, can run forever and you can join a carriage driveway used by Queen Victoria during her visits to Balmoral, the royal holiday residence just a short drive from the site.

The big event locally is September's Braemar Gathering frequented by royal visitors. Also popular is the Linn of Dee, where surging waters cascade under a rugged viewpoint bridge surrounded by acres of accessible woodland.

The Braemar site shares the valley floor with the fine Braemar Golf Club and also the bustling Clunie Water – a short distance from its rendezvous with the River Dee. It is the high country, however, that really sets the sporting pulse racing, whether you are walking, climbing, mountain-biking or enjoying Glenshee, the winter-sport centre nine miles up the road.

Braemar, Royal Deeside, fine castles, the Cairngorms National Park, Ballater, Aberdeen... there is much on offer but, despite a hurricane warning, my booking at the Club's Lochside site at Forfar, county town of Angus, was calling.

This is an award-winning, grassy five-acre site alongside the water that forms part of Forfar Loch Country Park, a short walk from town centre shops. The site, taken over by the Club a couple of years back, has been undergoing an extensive refurbishment and improvement programme and facilities and park amenities make it ideal for young families. The site is segregated from, but sits alongside, a range of attractions, including a children's play area, tennis courts, pitch and putt, crazy golf and a leisure centre with squash courts and fitness suite.



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# THE GREAT OUTDOORS

## LOCH LARKS



## Cycling

Clachan: National Cycle Network route 7 runs close to the Clachan site. Head south for a traffic-free ride to Locheanhead. Balbirnie Park: There are lots of local cycle routes in and around Glenrothes. Pick up National Cycle Network route 766 for a ride south to the Firth of Forth.

W sustrans.org.uk

## Park life

The Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park is ideal for boating, fishing, walking and cycling.

W lochlomond-trossachs.org



## Skiing

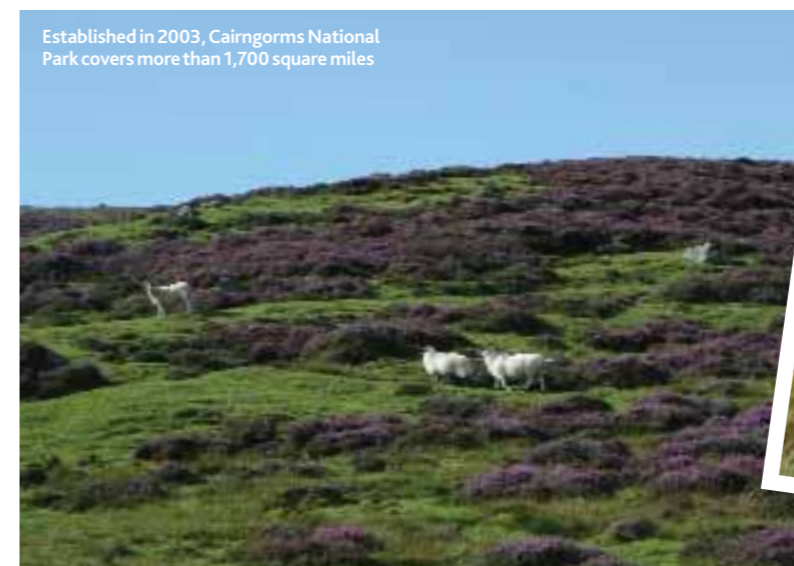
Braemar is ideally situated for enjoying the thrills of the Glenshee ski area which boasts 2,000 acres and 25 miles of pisted runs.

T 01339 741320  
W ski-glenshee.co.uk

## Bird watching

The Scottish Wildlife Trust's Montrose Basin is home to more than 50,000 migratory birds, including pink-footed geese and sedge warblers.

T 01674 676336  
W scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk



Established in 2003, Cairngorms National Park covers more than 1,700 square miles





# CULTURE

## Castle

Braemar Castle is the 17th-century hunting lodge and seat of Clan Farquharson. Closed in winter so check for opening times.

T 01339 741219  
W braemarcastle.co.uk



## Theatre

Pitlochry Festival Theatre has a great line-up for its 2012 summer season including performances of *Little Shop of Horrors*, *The 39 Steps* and J M Barrie's *Dear Brutus*.

T 01796 484626  
W pitlochryfestivaltheatre.com



## Palace

Falkland Palace, built in the early 1500s, was the country residence and hunting lodge of Mary Queen of Scots. Its grounds are also home to Britain's oldest real tennis court.

T 0844 493 2186  
W fnts.org.uk



## Royal visits

Balmoral Estate has been the Scottish home of the Royal Family since 1848. In 2012, the grounds, gardens and exhibitions will be open daily from 1 April until 31 July.

T 01339 742534 W balmoralcastle.com



All this is in addition to the loch, with its fly-fishing opportunities, welcoming sailing club and, for landlubbers, encircling track, much appreciated by joggers, cyclists and dog owners.

About 50 of the 70 pitches are now hardstandings, there are additional and uprated showers and improved baby-toddler and vegetable preparation amenities. There are also more service points around the site – in short, it's all shiny, new and quite splendid.

Top spot for tourists is Glamis Castle, childhood home of the late Queen Mother, and golfers will enjoy the good heathland track in Forfar plus many more local options.

The Kingdom of Fife, on the doorstep of Balbirnie Park, my fourth site, is one of Scotland's surprise packages. Here, history, chunky architecture and rolling green hills team up with a lovely coastline and arty-crafty fishing villages. The Balbirnie site sits on the wooded flank of a 400-acre country park, where undulating grasslands are criss-crossed by inviting paths and bordered by magnificent trees which, in early summer, are lit up by towering colour-bursts of azaleas and rhododendrons.

The eight-acre site accommodates 80 or so pitches, in open glades or among specimen trees. Shower and toilet facilities, housed in a recently refurbished block, are excellent and local activity treats are numerous.



Balbirnie Park Club site

The parkland, bordered on its opposite flank by a quality golf course, heads the list and is hugely popular with dog owners.

Markinch's shops and restaurants are half a mile away, while Glenrothes and Kirkcaldy are also handy for swimming, ice-skating, ten-pin bowling, horse-riding and more. Dundee, Perth, Loch Leven, St Andrews and the historic Falkland Palace and gardens are all well worth visiting, but do not miss Fife's magnificent coastal path and the salty East Neuk communities clinging to the shoreline like limpets.

Bracing, scenic, spectacular, highland, lowland, untamed country or manicured park... it's all there on this modest tour. ■

## MEMBERS' VIEW

Colin and Susan Eeles, from East Lothian, are more than happy with Balbirnie Park. "The site is fine and the shower and toilet block facilities are good. The park is also ideal for our dog, Sumo, with acres of space right next to the site."



David Witty, a Braemar regular for years, not only loves the site, the local golf club and the village, he has made many friends locally. "I've just taken a friend of mine from Braemar up to the golf club for lunch," he said. "What could be better? The area is just superb."

Brian and Clare Sharkey, from West Lothian, have a seasonal pitch at Clachan. "It's lovely here – peaceful and with very good walks in the area. It's a site better suited to couples and retired folk rather than young families but it is a fine central base camp, with touring options in all directions."

