



# Explore Discover Enjoy

Tom Weir's Loch Lomond Wonderland



LOTTERY FUNDED

# Welcome

Welcome to 'Tom Weir's Loch Lomond Wonderland' - a very special place that for many years was the home of Tom Weir, Scotland's most loved mountain man and one of Scotland's greatest storytellers and conservationists.

Through his writings and broadcasts Tom introduced several generations to the wonders of Loch Lomond and other parts of Scotland.

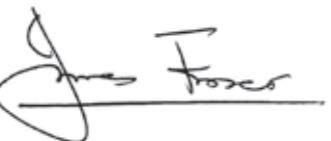
In this publication we share some of Tom's evocative insights into the rich and diverse cultural and natural heritage of Loch Lomond, which he wrote so passionately about in the Scots Magazine 50 years ago.

We also share some of the great work produced by 300 children from the 6 primary schools around Loch Lomond who have captured what they consider to be some of the loch's current day wonders in photographs, drawings, poems, paintings and short stories.

Through their work it is clear to see that the children love living in the Loch Lomond area and are as passionate as Tom was about the scenery, history, wildlife and nature of this wonderland.

We hope this booklet will encourage you to explore, discover and enjoy 'Tom Weir's Loch Lomond Wonderland' and also support the ongoing efforts of the Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs. It is the only independent conservation charity working to protect, promote and provide a range of services and projects, with the help of local businesses and volunteers, for the benefit of people and nature in the Loch Lomond area and the wider National Park.

You can support the Friends by becoming a member, visit: [www.lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk](http://www.lochlomondtrossachs.org.uk)



**James Fraser, Chairman**  
Friends of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs  
June 2016



*'From our eyrie on the MacGregor shore we feel as free as Rob himself, wage slaves no longer, but with hearts light as the blue sky as we set off on the high contouring path in a scent of bluebells and rowan blossom.'*

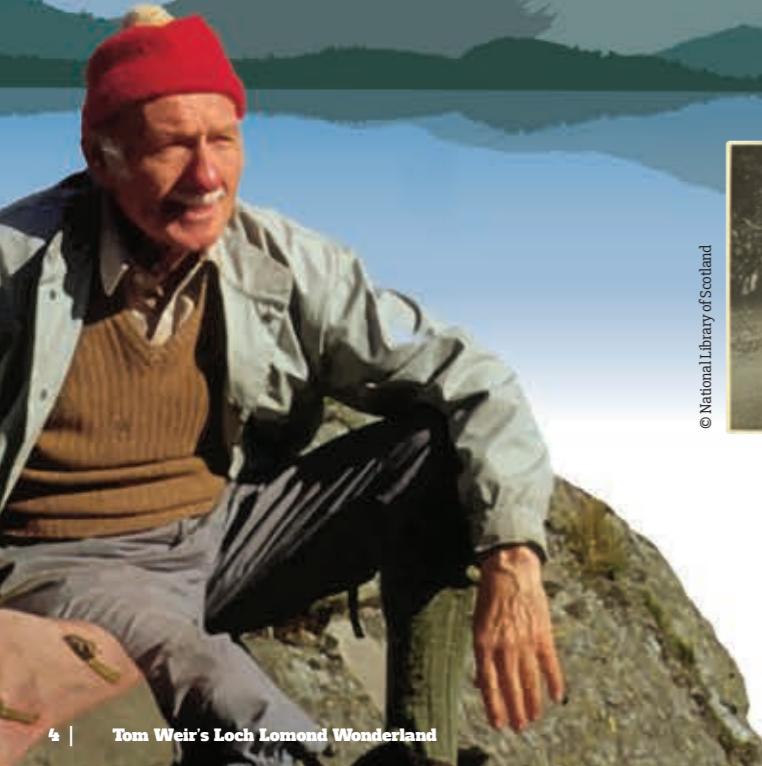
Tom Weir - August, 1976



Words and photographs (unless otherwise credited)  
by Paul Saunders Media & Photography

# Tom Weir 1914 – 2006

Mountaineer, photographer, naturalist, journalist, writer, broadcaster and conservation campaigner



© National Library of Scotland



**T**om Weir's origins in the midst of Springburn's heavy engineering din and grime gave little hint of what he would become. Then again maybe his yearning for the unsullied beauty of wild places was an instinctive reaction to all of that— a lust for clean air and big horizons.

Tom did not shine at school, leaving aged 14 to a first job cutting firewood. He later progressed to a post as a grocery assistant, but it wasn't for him. A chance meeting with a kindred spirit on a train led to an impromptu camping trip and Tom was hooked. He had joined the army of young working-class men throughout industrial Britain who, in the aftermath of the First World War and the Great Depression, were answering to the call of the great outdoors. Any free time was now spent exploring the mountains, glens, lochs and islands of Scotland.



© National Library of Scotland

*'We strike out for the twisting northern ridge of Ben Lomond crossing a big, peaty hollow where red deer rise from the hags and race for a rock outcrop to stand in elegance looking down on us.'*

Tom Weir- August, 1976

Tom was 26 when war came again, but throughout his service as a gunner his thoughts were never far away from what he really wanted to do. After the war he worked for a few years with the Ordnance Survey before taking the plunge into a full-time career as a writer, journalist, photographer and climber. He published his first book, *Highland Days*, in 1948 and in 1949 began a 50 year association with the Scots Magazine, writing his regular column "My Month."

Tom's first love was still the mountains and in 1950 and 1952 he took part in 2 ground breaking expeditions to the Himalayas. There were many other mountaineering adventures, but in 1959, as he said himself, "at the dangerous age of 45,"

Tom married his other love of many years, Rhona Dickson.

They settled a few miles south of Balmaha in the village of Gartocharn, where Rhona worked as headmistress of the local primary school.

Tom's output of books, articles, lectures and broadcasts, was astonishing and it culminated in 'Weir's Way,' the Scottish Television series which made him a household name. The show ran from 1976 to 1987 and Tom always appeared in his trademark Fair Isle jumper and toorie hat as he explored his country's landscapes, wildlife and history. ('Weir's Way' has since been repeated a number of times and it still gets record ratings)

In a long and prolific career, Tom won many awards and accolades including the first ever John Muir Award for Lifetime Achievement. He was vice-president of the Scottish Rights of Way Society, an executive member of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, and president of the Scottish Mountaineering Club from 1984 to 1986. He was also a founding member and Honorary Vice-President of the Friends of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs and a tireless and influential campaigner for protecting Loch Lomond.

**Written by John Urquhart**  
Vice-Chairman  
Friends of Loch Lomond  
& The Trossachs



## My Loch Lomond

Sunday morning in Gartocharn where I live, and I am up early to enjoy a few hours on the marshes of Endrick Mouth before the world is awake.

This is a time when I don't want company, but like to let my mind dwell only on the sights and sounds of the Loch Lomond shore.

Each day has its own mood. This one has vigorous clarity. The crags of nearby Conic Hill are grey. The heather is richly warm. Yellow water lilies float with pink persicaria in the pools. The white blocks of quartz

near the top of Ben Lomond sparkle like snow, and cloud shadows float across the knobbly peaks of the Arrochar Alps.

It is not so much a walk I am taking as a series of stops, to enjoy the little things that tell how the breeding time-clock is ticking: mergansers with big flotillas of fluffy youngsters, the plumper shelduck which nest in rabbit holes. The vividly black-white-and-red adults are swimming about with bundles of striped young. Alarmed, a dozen of the youngsters try to keep up with mother, who puts on a spurt.

I am on a narrowing strip of land of shallow lagoons which ends at the Ring Point where the River Endrick discharges into the loch. These lagoons are former mouths of the Endrick, before the river was pushed back by ridges of sand thrown up in winter storms over the past 200 years or so.

I put up my binocs towards Balmaha and instantly I am alerted by the slow wing-beats and sailing of a large bird of prey with a white head. The chocolate mantle and light underparts are very familiar to me, for ospreys have been turning up here for a few years, and twice I have had the good luck to see them plumping in and taking a fish before my eyes.



This one wastes no time. It drops steeply from 500 feet, hits the water with a splash, is under for a moment but seems to be having some trouble rising, bashing its wings on the water several times to lift off hoisting a hanging fish that appears to be hooked by one talon. The osprey seems to be off balance, and with an awkward swerve drops back into the water and goes under with the fish.

It reappears, seems to be swimming for a moment, then after a few slaps with its wings on the water up it goes, and this time the big fish—a pike I think—is gripped by the middle and is being slung head-first and neatly horizontal as I watch the bird flapping vigorously to gain height.



An extract from an article by Tom Weir for Scots Magazine entitled *My Loch Lomond*, first published in July 1976

# — THE WALKERS WONDERLAND —

About Loch Lomond I can claim one unwanted distraction. I know it from within as well as without, for with a friend, I've been overturned in the 600ft-deep middle stretch between Rowardennan and Inverbeg, clinging desperately to an upside-down canoe and buffeted by a June north-easter.

The story, which happened about 20 years ago, could be called "How to Lose £250 of Cameras," and I would have left them ashore had I known then that the easterly airt is the dangerous one for canoeing on Loch Lomond. My companion had just told me to stop worrying about the squalls that were rocking the canoe, when an arrowhead of advancing rain and wind struck. I remember the canoe sliding into a trough, being lifted on to the crest of a wave, and then neatly turning over.

There was not much hope of our cries being heard.

There was no time for fear as I strove to break free from a canoe which was holding me like a cork in a bottle.

I had the strange vision of being in a dream, watching myself drown when my body was suddenly released and I felt myself going down and down into darkness.

Again I had the feeling of seeing myself as on film turning over in the water like a seal in a tank and breaking through a greenish roof into daylight. In front of me was the upside-down canoe with my companion clinging to it, shouting my name. A few strokes and I was beside him, trying to get a grip as it spun awkwardly under our combined weight. "I was getting worried – you took a long time to come up," he said, I said it must have been my camera bag jamming my knees against the deck, acting as a plug.

After half an hour the cold was having a weakening effect on hands and arms. But we were lucky. We were spotted by two of our friends in single canoes. They came alongside and we transferred our grip from the overturned canoe to their sterns and were towed ashore by hard paddling.

To get warm, we ran up and down while our companions lit a bonfire on the beach. Clothing was wrung out, dry garments offered and a phone call was put in to Rowardennan to summon a vehicle to drive round the loch and take us back to the Youth Hostel.

This is what you call paying for your experience the hard way, and I felt lucky to have paid no more for it than a steep rise in insurance premium for the new cameras I'd bought.

From our eyrie on the MacGregor shore we feel as free as Rob himself, wage-slaves no longer, but with hearts light as the blue sky as we set off along the high contouring path in a scent of bluebells and rowan blossom. Below us, oak woods plunge to the shore and soon we are on the edge of the Cuilness gorge in a stronghold of the pied flycatcher.

Great views open behind us as we climb. Down across the loch is Inveruglas Isle, with the ruin of the McFarlane castle sacked by Cromwell. Beyond the plunge of the gorge are



the rocks of Craig Rostan, peppered with MacGregor ruins. Among them are some old charcoal-burning "bloomeries" for smelting iron. We throw ourselves down, necks reclining on rucksacks.

"You canny beat it," says Matt as he identifies the snow-veined peaks forming the headwall of Glen Falloch.

We can see the passes of the Lairig Arnan and the Dubh Eas which lead from Loch Lomond through to Loch Fyne, ancient cattle-droving routes which brought easy booty to the reiving MacGregors and

McFarlanes, whose forays persisted long after they had died down in other parts of the Highlands.

The Government built a barracks at Inversnaid to contain Rob Roy, but he destroyed it before it could be completed—a far-seeing chief.

On again we strike east for the twisting north ridge of Ben Lomond, crossing a big, peaty hollow where red deer rise from the hags and race for a rock outcrop to stand in elegant grace looking down on us.

*An extract from an article by Tom Weir for Scots Magazine entitled The Walkers Wonderland, first published in August 1976*



# The Story of Balmaha

Written by John Urquhart

Down through the centuries early settlers, clansfolk, farmers, fishermen, smugglers and industrialists have all used Balmaha Bay's sheltered natural harbour.

## Get on the Loch

Today Balmaha is a destination for West Highland Way walkers as well as being a focus for those seeking ways to get out on the water, it has never been easier to enjoy the delights of the loch.



© John Urquhart

Rowing boats can be hired from Balmaha Boatyard where you can also access an on demand ferry over to the nature reserve of Inchcailloch, as well as the historic mailboat cruise that calls at the loch's inhabited islands. During the summer months there is also a waterbus service from Balmaha Pier to the conservation village of Luss on the opposite shore of the loch.

## Clan Links

Due to Loch Lomond's strategic location there is a rich history of deeply rooted clans and migrant nobility settled in the area by the monarchy.

Among those most closely associated with the area are the Earls of Lennox, the Colquhouns, MacFarlanes, MacGregors, Galbraiths and Buchanans. Ownership reflects the changing fortunes of the clans and later migrants.



## Whisky Smuggling

Private distilling was restricted and finally banned in 1781. Also after the Act of Union in 1713 high excise duties were imposed on spirits and wine. This resulted in a growth illicit distilling in the Loch Lomond area.

Islands on the loch were considered remote enough to hide the illicit stills and there was a large scale operation on Inchfad with the whisky being landed and stored at Balmaha before being transported to Glasgow. At its peak during the Napoleonic period it is estimated that up to one hundred gallons of whisky per day was smuggled from Loch Lomond to Glasgow.



© Deepstream Design



*'No camera can do justice to the peak upon peak which forms the whole northern horizon above the mirror to the sky that is the broad base of the loch, nearly five miles across, but saved from monotony by its archipelago of wooded islands.'*

Tom Weir, July 1976

# Tom's Balmaha Discovery Trail

Take a 30 minute walk around Balmaha, starting and finishing at Weir's Rest, and along the way explore a forest, beaches and enjoy magnificent views of Loch Lomond and its nearby islands. Answer the questions (answers, printed on the back page), get them all right and treat yourself to some Loch Lomond ice cream at nearby St Mocha!

>> Start at Weir's Rest, where you will find the answer to the first question.

**Q1** What sparkles like snow at the top of Ben Lomond?

- a) Quartz
- b) The lookout point
- c) Diamonds

>> Cross the road now and go into the car park.

**Q3** How far are you away from the village of Drymen?

- a) 5 miles
- b) 10 miles
- c) 12 miles

>> Walk towards the end of the car park and enter the forest trail.

**Q5** What is the name of the forest trail?

- a) Magical
- b) Mythical
- c) Millennium

>> Walk towards the The Village Shop and see if you can spot an Emergency Defibrillator.

**Q2** What colour is the box that contains it?

- a) Green
- b) Yellow
- c) Red



>> On the bend take a left following the narrow road that runs along the waters edge. This path leads down to the pier. At the end of the road go onto the footpath that runs alongside the loch and continue until you reach a bridge.

**Q7** What is the bridge made of?

- a) Rope
- b) Metal
- c) Wood

>> Turn left and then walk through the forest, where the path reaches the road, cross over and turn right following the path along the edge of the loch.

**Q6** On the bend in the road there is a road sign showing the % of hills gradient, what is it?

- a) 5%
- b) 10%
- c) 15%

Explore a little further and find beaches to play on, or turn back and head back to Weir's Rest.

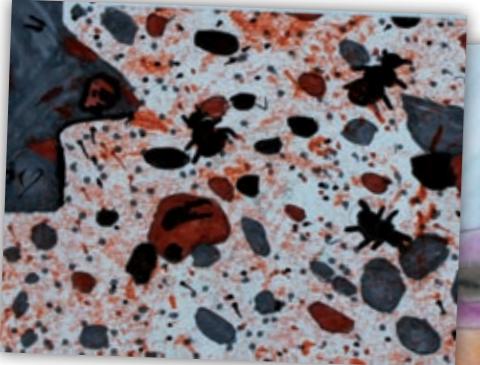


© Illustration by Claire Hewitt



# Buchanan Primary School

The eight children from Buchanan Primary School, just a few miles from The Tom Weir Statue in Balmaha have been visiting some of the Loch Lomond wonders that are right on their doorstep, with a school visit to Inchcailloch Island and a walk up Conic Hill.



“ Conic Hill is 361m high, beside the village of Balmaha. You get amazing views of the loch and the islands. There is a good play area at the bottom.



Cara Melrose P5



“ Inchcailloch is a beautiful island on Loch Lomond and it means the isle of the old woman. It is easy to get to by boat from Balmaha. The highest point on the island is 85m and you can get lovely views from the summit across to Ben Lomond. Inchcailloch is the largest island in Loch Lomond. There are woodlands, wildlife and beaches.

In my opinion you should go to Inchcailloch because you could learn about what happened in olden times.

Harris McMillan P5



by Isys



by Freddie



by Sean Allan P1

“ I recommend Inchcailloch because the views are beautiful and the wildlife is great. The beach is amazing too.

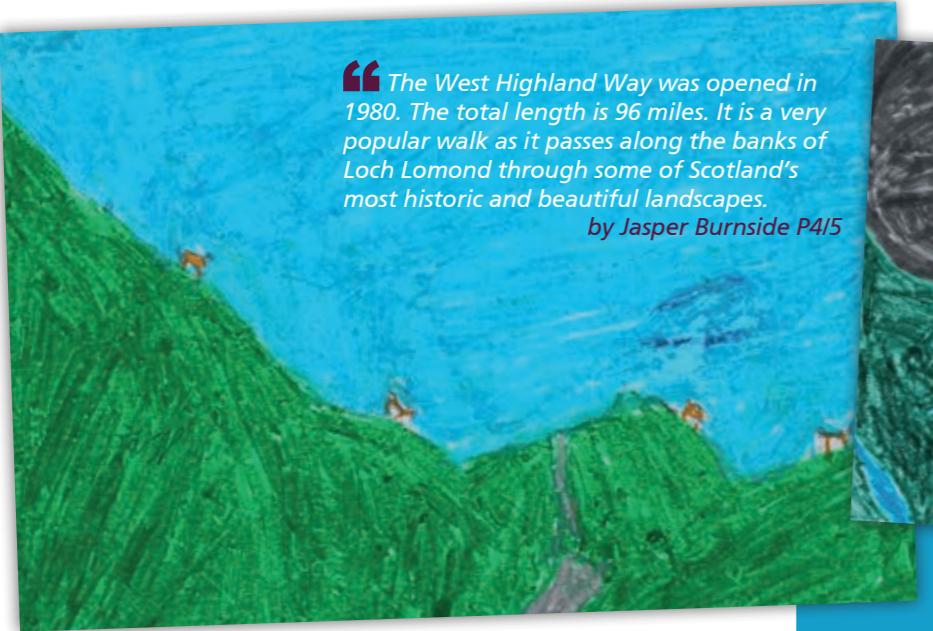
Cara Melrose P5

“ Balmaha is a busy village on the eastern shores of Loch Lomond. It is popular with walkers and tourists because it is part of the West Highland Way. I think that you should go to Balmaha because it has wonderful sites to visit and has an amazing beach.

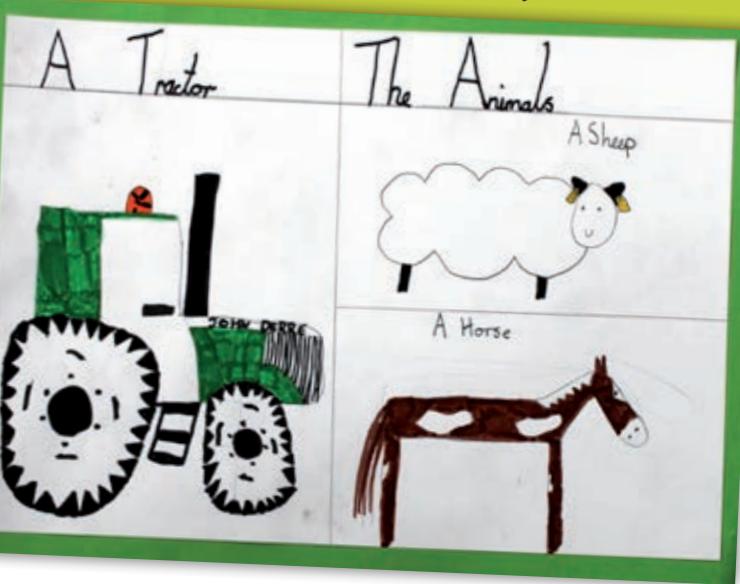
Callan P5

# Drymen Primary School

Drymen Primary School is at the heart of a beautiful Loch Lomond village. The pupils of P4/5 chose to share some local history, including the story of a famous prisoner who was detained nearby during the Second World War. Drymen is the starting point of the Rob Roy Way and an overnight stop for walkers of the West Highland Way, the pupils have found out more about these popular walks and drawn pictures.



**“**Rudolf Hess was a Nazi Deputy Leader and loyal friend of Adolf Hitler. During World War 2 Hess was flying over Scotland when he was shot down in Eaglesham, near Glasgow and was taken to the Buchanan Military Hospital, near Drymen.  
by Tessa Knowles P4/5



# Jamestown Primary School

Jamestown Primary School is in Balloch. Balloch is a gateway to the National Park and home to the headquarters of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park. At Loch Lomond Shores in Balloch there are magnificent views of Ben Lomond. Pupils painted and drew photographs of the famous mountain that provides the loch with its name. Here are just a few of their wonderful pictures of Ben Lomond.

*The pupils of Jamestown Primary School also told us why they like living near Loch Lomond...*

*"There is lots to do, this is a great place to live"*

*Zoe Colraine P7*

*"When the sunsets the colours reflect on the loch"*

*Cheryl McCreadie P7*

*"I love going on boats on the loch"*

*Jack Kane P5*



*"I go to the parks with my friends"*  
Gemma Meechan P6



*"I love canoeing and paddling"*  
Lois Walker P4



*"I love listening to the birds singing"*  
Caitlin Boyd P4

*"There are lots of parks and good views of Ben Lomond"*  
Gregor Munn P5



# Luss Primary School

Luss is a conservation village with a street of cottages that were built from the local quarry. Every year thousands of tourists come from all over the world to see the village, the pier and the stunning scenery of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park.



There are seven pupils at Luss Primary School and all were involved in these pages. They chose to include photographs that they have taken of their village, along with some of its history, as well as details about their project to improve the numbers of Powan fish in the loch.



Luss Primary School has six green flags from Keep Scotland Beautiful and a total of four green awards.

Luss Church is famous for holding hundreds of weddings each year, in fact more than anywhere else in Scotland, apart from Gretna Green.



CRUISE LOCH LOMOND



**WE ❤️ POWAN**  
Powan is a fresh water white fish found in Loch Lomond and Loch Eck. The population in Loch Eck is thriving but in Loch Lomond Powan are almost extinct. This is because a fisherman accidentally dropped live bait into the Loch Lomond. There is now more ruff than any other fish in Loch Lomond. They eat powan eggs and have driven the powan almost to extinction in Loch Lomond.



Down at Luss beach we have swans, ducks, Canadian geese and gulls more or less year round. Every year we have to chase a pair of ducks from nesting on our sports field before the grass cutters arrive. Pupils call them Donald and Daisy.

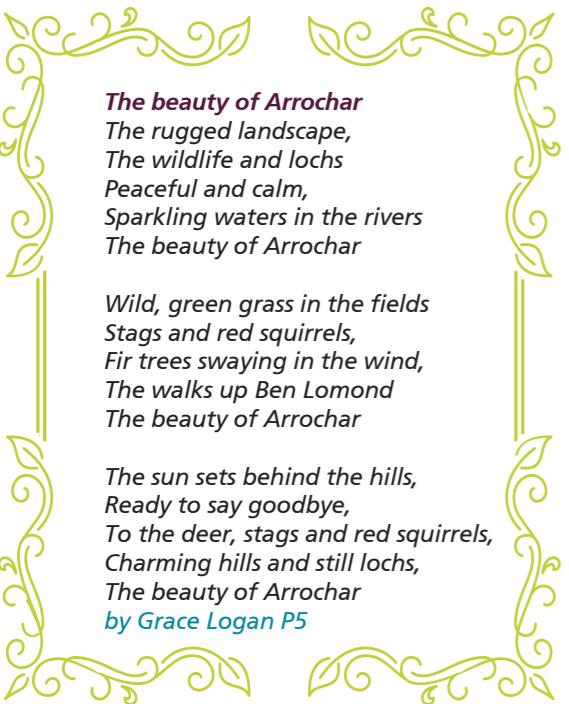
By Megan



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# Arrochar Primary School

Arrochar and Tarbet are in Argyll & Bute and can be reached by water, road and rail. The school selected children from across P1–7 to get involved in this project and their paintings feature the nearby Cobbler, the Three Lochs Way walk and Arrochar Church. They have also written some poems about Loch Lomond.



by Grace Huggans P7



by Lara Bainbridge P6



**The Village's Scenery**  
The water stays calm  
The birds sing and chatter  
As Ben Lomond stands above Loch Lomond  
Overlooking the rocky beaches

The breathtaking landscape,  
The steep cycle routes  
As I walk along I see green trees  
The snow line on the Cobbler

As I walk I see all sorts of flowers,  
Wild red deer roam the fields,  
Trees are good for children to climb  
The wildlife is outstanding

by Findlay Mustarde P4

# Gartocharn Primary School

Gartocharn Primary School has a special connection to the Tom Weir story. Tom's wife Rhona was the Headmistress of this school for many years. Children from all classes have drawn pictures and shared their thoughts from a school walk to nearby Aber Shore.

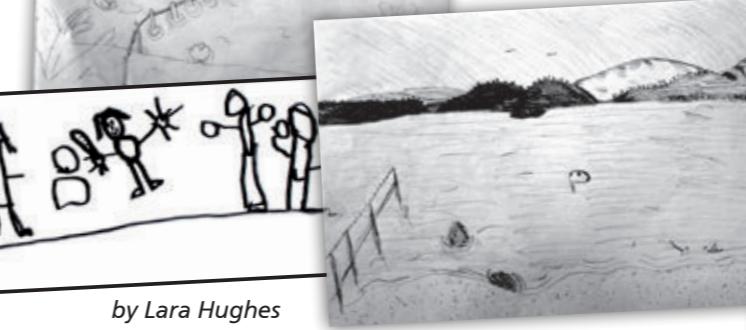


On Friday 18th March 2016 all 72 pupils of Gartocharn Primary School walked along Aber Shore. Here are some extracts of the diaries of P4/5 pupils.



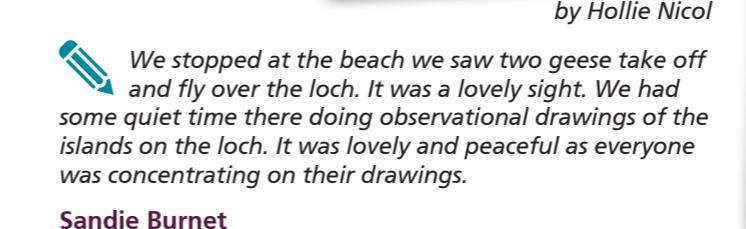
 At Shore Wood Beach, Paula from the RSPB came to meet us. She talked to us about the geese that migrate here every year and about the signs of spring to look out for as we walked along Shore Wood. It was really interesting as I love geese.  
Sophie Primrose

 We walked to Endrick View Point. We stopped tin Shore Wood to do the amazing bug hunt using our bug hunting bags. We caught some different bugs in jars and tried to identify them using our bug identification cards. I found a black beetle and a leach. We played in the field for a wee bit.  
Kate Hopkins



by Lara Hughes

 We stopped at the beach we saw two geese take off and fly over the loch. It was a lovely sight. We had some quiet time there doing observational drawings of the islands on the loch. It was lovely and peaceful as everyone was concentrating on their drawings.  
Sandie Burnet



by Hollie Nicol

 By now we were all exhausted and ready to go home so we walked back up through the fields to the Millennium Hall and back to the school. When I got back to school I was cold and muddy but extremely happy and proud of myself. I'm sure everyone else was too. I had a great day and I feel very lucky to live in such a beautiful area of the world and to be able to do all the fun things here.  
Beth Gilhilan

by Penny Hopkins



## Reflection of Tom Weir

I think my affection for Loch Lomond makes it easy for me to relate to Tom Weir, a great icon of the Loch Lomond area. He loved having adventures, climbing mountains and rowing over the Loch.

His wife was the head of Gartocharn Primary, so he would take the children on a day trip up the local hill, 'The Dumpling' so that they could see the spectacular view of the loch that he so loved.

by LillyBelle Mohaut P7





*'At the end of the day the wondrous beauty of Loch Lomond is a public responsibility in which all of us must play a part.'*

Tom Weir-August, 1976



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