



50 fascinating facts about Highland Perthshire

1. **Edradour Distillery**, just above Pitlochry is the smallest distillery in Scotland. The whisky made here went into a super deluxe blend called King's Ransom, which was the world's most expensive whisky, when 200,000 bottles went down aboard the SS Politician, wrecked of Eriskay in 1941. This was the inspiration for Compton Mackenzie's Whisky Galore.
2. Pitlochry has another, much larger distillery at the other end of the town: **Bell's whisky** is made at the Blair Athol distillery. Both Blair Athol and Edradour have visitor centres.
3. Although Speyside is the place possibly most associated with whisky-making (and the Whisky Trail) there are other distilleries in Perthshire, too: **Dewar's at Aberfeldy, and Famous Grouse at Crieff**.
4. Until 2002, there was a well-known boarding school called **Rannoch School** on the south shore of Loch Rannoch. It closed due to having insufficient funds (and paying boarders) to continue operating.
5. Rannoch School boasted the only **8-hole golf course** in the world.
6. Rannoch Moor is a 50 square mile area of raised bog, peppered with hundreds of lochans and innumerable streams. It sits at around 1000 feet above sea level. Robert Louis Stevenson's view of it in the novel Kidnapped was: *"A wearier looking desert a man never saw"*. Must have been a dreich day!
7. **Moulin**, at the north east end of Pitlochry, stands at an ancient Scottish waypoint. Important routes from Strathtay to Strathardle and from Dunkeld to Donavoured both passed through Moulin. This meeting of routes has caused many people to visit or pass through Moulin during the last 1,000 years.
8. The earliest evidence of a community living at Moulin is the standing stones at Baledmund and Balnakeilly, which are about 2,000 to 3,000 years old. **Hut Circles** still evident on the hill just behind the present village. Archaeological investigation shows these huts as being used from around 3000BC to as recently as 1250 AD.
9. **Moulin Church** was founded by St Colm in about 700 AD. This placed Moulin at the centre of church and commercial life in the area for more than 1,000 years.
10. Today there's a **micro-brewery** at the Moulin Inn (which itself has been around since 1695). Just the thing to slake the thirst after a wander round the historic and scenic parts of the village!
11. Moulin is the starting point for a great wee hill-walk up **Ben Vrackie**, the very attractive hill that sits to the north-east of Pitlochry and offers great views. There's a reinforced path all the way up (to combat erosion by thousands of boots). Keep your eye on your lunch-pack at the top, especially in winter as there are mountain goats who are well-used to people and not averse to pinching a mouthful from un-tended rucksacks.
12. In 903 AD, a **Viking raid on Dunkeld** culminated with the local Picts defeating the invaders in a battle just over Moulin Moor in Strathardle. People associate Vikings with the coasts but the rascals got everywhere...
13. Stage, television and screen actor **Alan Cumming** was born in Aberfeldy. Alan became internationally known for his stage role in Cabaret as the Master of Ceremonies, which won him a Tony award. You may have seen him in the Bond film *Goldeneye*.
14. Another famous son of the area is **Ewan MacGregor** who comes from Crieff. He shot to fame in Shallow Grave and Trainspotting and recently made two epic, televised motorbike journeys around the world and from John O'Groats in northern Scotland to Cape Town in South Africa.
15. The **Loch of Lowes** is a small loch at the northern edge of the valley of Strathmore lying adjacent to the Loch of Butterstone and the Loch of Craighush, a mile (1 1/2 km) northeast of Dunkeld. Noted for its breeding ospreys, it is managed as a nature reserve by the Scottish Wildlife Trust.
16. Dunkeld is home to **Dougie MacLean**, composer and musician. Dougie is likely most famous for his song Caledonia but his credits include composing the music for the film Last of the Mohicans.
17. Perthshire is known as Big Tree country. Many of Scotland's heritage trees have their home here. The **Fortingall Yew**, the oldest living thing in Europe at some 5,000 years old is one example of the superlative collection across this part of Scotland.

18. **Killiecrankie**, now managed by National Trust for Scotland, has excellent interpretation of the valley's part in Scotland's turbulent history in addition to offering year round walks along the banks of the river Garry. The area has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest because of the quality of its woodland.
19. Blair Castle is the family seat of the Duke of Atholl. The Duke of Atholl commands Britain's only (legal!) **private army**, the Atholl Highlanders. The 10th Duke reactivated the long-dormant 80-man army the Dukes of Atholl have been authorized to maintain since 1845. Queen Victoria, who had visited the castle the year before, had been so impressed by the affection shown for the 6th Duke by local people that she granted the right in perpetuity.
20. **Blair Castle's** distinctive white-washed edifice in the Scottish-baronial style was the work of architect David Bryce (1803-76). Bryce is now acclaimed for this styling and was designer of over 260 notable buildings including Fettes College, Bank of Scotland HQ on the Mound, Edinburgh and Torosay Castle on Mull.
21. The Potter family rented Dalguise House, today a residential activity centre, as a summer retreat in 1871 to 1881. **Beatrix Potter** would have been 5 years old when the family made the first trip to Scotland.
22. Ardoch is the site of one of the most important surviving monuments of the Roman period in Britain. A fort with remarkably preserved earthworks and a series of six overlapping marching camps have been identified as important military installations built by **the Roman Army** at various times between AD 80 and AD 200.
23. A standing stone and burial mound in a garden at Enochdhu (Perth and Kinross), the **Giant's Grave** (or Ardle's Grave) is said to be the last resting place of an unusually tall Pictish Leader called Ardle, who gave his name to the valley in which the stone lies (Strath Ardle).
24. Perthshire has more than **40 Munros**, hills over 3,000 ft [914m]. It is ideal walking and for Munro baggers has the bonus of being able to knock off more than 1 Munro summit in a day.
25. Possibly the best place to do this is in **Glenshee**, in the east of Perthshire. From the ski centre there you can 'bag' a munro (Carn Aosda) in about 45 minutes, return, from the car park. A further 3 hills above 3000ft (914m) are easily knocked off in around 3 hours on the west side of the road: Cairnwell, Carn nan Sac and Carn a' Gheoidh.
26. A six to eight hour walk to the east of the road could add a further **six summits** to your list: Creag Leacach, Glas Maol, Cairn of Claise, Tom Buidhe, Tolmount and Carn nan Tuirc. Congratulations – nine down, 275 to go till you've bagged all 284 Munros in Scotland.
27. **Schiehallion** was in the past used as part of a scientific experiment by the Astronomer-Royal, Nevil Maskelyne (1732 - 1811). He measured the deflection of a pendulum on the slopes of the mountain to determine the mass of the earth.
28. A picturesque waterfall, the **Falls of Bruar**, are located a mile (1.5 km) to the north of Bruar and are accessed by an attractive wooded walk. Visited by a number of literary figures, the falls in 1787 attracted the attention of Robert Burns who found the barren treeless landscape less than pleasing. In his 'Humble petition of Bruar Water to the noble Duke of Athole' he suggested that trees would enhance the view, a suggestion that resulted in the planting of 120,000 larch and Scots pines by the Duke of Atholl ten years later.
29. **Stanley Mill** is the best preserved cotton mill in the country. Founded in 1786 by Sir Richard Arkwright, despite fire, the Napoleonic Wars and cotton famine, production continued here until 1989. Three mills with brick arched vaults supported on cast iron columns and beams were built in the 1820s and were powered by seven massive waterwheels. They were restored in the 1990s and 2000s and today are a historic visitor attraction. Some have been converted into flats, too.
30. Various locally-based **river rafting** companies offer variations on raft and canoe activities on Tay as it flows rapidly past Stanley Mill and at other locations, mainly upstream, especially at Grandtully which is a UK competition centre for rafting and white-water kayaking.
31. The river Tay is **Britain's largest river system** and is tidal as far as Perth, which still has a working port. The Tay is possibly the UK's premier river for salmon fishing.
32. **Salmon migrate** into different rivers at different times of year. Each river system has its own unique families of fish that have evolved by their spawning strategies to survive its particular environments so fishing seasons were arranged to suit each river. Many rivers have lost their spring runs of fish so midsummer to autumn provides the best fishing except for the larger North and East Coast rivers which continue to provide good fishing early in the year. The Tay season runs from 15 January to 15 October.
33. Father of Strathspey and Reel music **Niel Gow** (correct spelling!) was born in Inver near Dunkeld. Gow, son of a weaver played for the nobility and had his portrait painted twice by Henry Raeburn.

34. **Robert Burns** travelled through the area on his Highland tour in 1787. He is said to have made a point of meeting Niel Gow and collected many songs and other works for his collection. A walk through the Den of Moness, inspired him to compose the *Birks o Aberfeldy* during this trip, the Den is now better known by the song's title.
35. Until the **Thomas Telford-designed bridge** was built over the Tay at Dunkeld in 1809 there was a ferry across the river.
36. Both **Dunkeld and Scone** played the role of Capital of Scotland in the early days of the formation of Scotland as a nation.
37. **The Hermitage** is a folly built in the 18th century to entertain visitors and provide a spectacular view of the Falls of Braan. It is located just to the north of Dunkeld on the west side of the A9 road. A short walk from the car park through lovely pine woods takes you to the spectacular cataract. It's more spectacular in spring than summer, as the river is swollen with melt-water.
38. Nearby is the tallest tree in Britain, a Douglas Fir over 60 metres high.
39. The man who first isolated **insulin**, John MacLeod, was born near Dunkeld in 1869. He won the Nobel Prize in 1923 for his work.
40. **Drummond castle** dates to the 15th century and is home to the Duke of Perth. It is possible to visit the gardens of the castle in summertime.
41. **Birnam Wood** features in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as part of a witches prophesy. The settings and characters for the play are scattered around vast areas of Perthshire, Aberdeenshire and Moray, however, so he may have used a fair dose of artistic licence with his geography!
42. The **Birnam Oak** is said to be the last remaining survivor of Birnam Wood, made famous by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The tree may be over 1000 years old and many of its branches are held up by wooden crutches!
43. From the Middle Ages until the 17th century Perthshire (and the rest of Scotland!) was a wild, rowdy place and cattle rustling was commonplace. **The Caterans** (cattle rustlers) would descend from their rough bothies high in the mountains across to wreak havoc on the prosperous and peaceful farmland below, driving stolen cattle and booty through remote glens using ancient drove routes.
44. This illegal activity is celebrated in the **Cateran Trail** - a 64 mile (103 km) circular, waymarked walk following many of the routes that the Caterans used centuries ago. The Trail uses old drove routes, existing paths and minor roads and can be walked in a leisurely fashion over 5 days or in shorter sections.
45. **Gaelic** is still taught in the high schools in Aberfeldy, Pitlochry and Blairgowrie, as well as in some of the feeder primary schools. There are local Mod (Gaelic music and song) competitions in Aberfeldy and Pitlochry. Both these facts reflect the area's fairly recent Gaelic-speaking heritage.
46. The area around **Strathtummel and Rannoch** was firmly Gaelic-speaking until the 1950s.
47. The last **native Gaelic speaker** from Perthshire lived in Glenshee and only died in 1966.
48. The name 'Glenshee' is from the Gaelic 'gleann sidh' meaning '**fairy glen**'.
49. The **Pitlochry Festival Theatre** run a unique theatrical rep system, which allows visitors to see 6 different plays over six days. Did you know that:
 - each set takes 1,000 man hours, on average, to construct and paint;
 - the PFT rehearsal process begins with simultaneous rehearsals for the first 4 plays. Actors can work up to a 6 day week, with up to three sessions a day from 10.30am till 9pm;
 - to help build and remove sets quickly (they have only 2 hours for a complete turn around) all their sets are on wheels;
 - there are more wheels under the sets than there are seats in the auditorium!;
 - they use more than 100 spotlights and over a mile of electrical cable during a season; and
 - the patterned wallpaper on their sets is often hand stencilled, with up to 4 different hand cut stencils & colours and over 8,000 individually hand painted repetitions.
50. It's expected that the **Cairngorms National Park** area will be extended southwards as far as Blair Athol in lat 2009 or 2010.