

Suzannah Storm Goss

Bruce's Stone to Merrick



Writers' Walks



Suzannah Storm Goss

Suzannah Storm Goss is a Scottish poet and editor living in Kenya. Her work is shaped by her life between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. Suzannah won the Wigtown Festival Fresh Voice Award in 2024. Her debut collection, *A Parting in the Clouds: poems from Geita to Galloway*, was published in 2026. Copies are available from: suzannahgoss@gmail.com

Bruce's Stone to Merrick. A journey with teenagers;

During a summer of record-breaking temperatures and sunny blue skies, we watched the forecast for our long-anticipated hike change from 'cloudy' to 'heavy rain at noon'. We adjusted our plans and set out from Bruce's Stone in Glen Trool at around 11.30 am. After a month of warm weather, we could at least expect drier ground than on our last climb in 2024, when the paths became rivulets and our feet were soaked before we reached the bothy.

Bruce's Stone, erected in 1929, commemorates the battle in which Robert the Bruce, leading just 300 men, defeated an English army of 1,500 heavy cavalry by luring them to the steep banks of Loch Trool. From here, the clearly signposted 'Merrick Trail' climbs for about a mile through ancient forest beside Buchan Burn, its whisky-coloured falls tumbling out of sight. Our 'Walk the Highlands' and 'Windy' apps proved alarmingly accurate: the rain began in earnest. Waterproof boots, extra layers and lined jackets kept us warm and dry, although our pace slowed and the chatter ceased.

Beyond Kilsharg bothy, sadly destroyed by vandals in 2018, the trail crosses a forestry road before emerging onto open moorland. The prepared surface soon gives way to a rough track beside a wall, ascending steadily towards Benyellary. Right on schedule, the rain began to relent at 2.00 pm, but mist swallowed the promised views of Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. Nevertheless, the easing rain provided an ideal excuse for a snack, and we were well provisioned with Tesco meal deals, Twix bars, date and walnut health bites, apples, a Simpson's Victoria sponge cake and juices.

Continued overleaf.



Writers' Walks



Bruce's Stone to Merrick.

A journey with teenagers continued

After trekking this far, a few encouraging words rallied our teenage nieces, especially when some older boys—underdressed in shorts and perhaps nursing hangovers—turned back, and we pressed on from Benyellary's cairn. Sheep gazed through the mist, seemingly bemused by the bipeds bundled in yellow, orange and mauve, before skittering down the steep slope below the narrow connecting ridge.

Soon we reached the Merrick's whitewashed trig point, perched on a massive, tumbledown cairn. By 3.00 pm, sunlight was breaking through, revealing breathtakers of wild, empty country stretching west and north.

Rather than retrace our steps, we opted for the longer, more scenic descent: a 14 km (9-mile) circular route through a rugged panorama of coarse grasses and scattered lochs. Although slightly more demanding, the views of Loch Enoch and Loch Neldricken made the extra two miles well worthwhile. Longer routes are possible through Loch Valley, but it is best to carry an OS map in case mist descends; alternatively, consider downloading Gaia GPS, which shows the trails.

We headed directly from the summit, slightly south-east towards the Grey Man of Merrick—another perfect spot for a celebratory snack—then continued to the valley floor, clambering over partly buried, lichen-covered granite slabs shaped by glacial action.



Recycled

... sand into wine bottle
repurposed as rain gauge,
at a glass factory.

Fills with mountain sunshine
while waiting...

for the murmuring sea
and mascara-ed clouds, for rainfall,
to complete rain gauge...
a whole swathe of gold agates and greens.

Bruce's Stone to Merrick.

A journey with teenagers continued

Abundant flora included bog rosemary, pale butterwort, cotton-grass, bog myrtle and other summer flowers. Later, we were fortunate enough to see roe deer and spot hen harriers flying high above us and heading west, so we were glad to have packed binoculars. The warm spell had dried most of the hidden marshy patches, although the final descent from Loch Enoch crossed a pathless, open slope. As the mist lifted, the loch's mirroring vessel caught the shifting light and movement of clouds. A faint trail crossed tributaries before turning south-west, until the drystone wall, and keeping to the left of that. We re-entered the plantation, reached the forestry road near the bothy and followed the trail back to the car park.

At 4.15 pm, just before closing, we reached Glentrool Visitor Centre and treated ourselves to scones, carrot cake and tea—surely one of the best hillwalking cafés between the Merrick and Meall nan Con in Sutherland, especially after a misty hike up a Corbett. The teenagers, aged 12 and 13, were brilliant fun, grumbling only when the rain began and when their tummies started to rumble. Once the sky cleared, they discovered a new zest for the adventure and were proud to have climbed Dumfries and Galloway's highest peak, at 843 m—definitely something to brag about when school resumed last week.