

**THE
GLENLIVET.**



**THE CROWN
ESTATE**

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STEP BACK IN TIME WITH THE GLENLIVET SMUGGLERS' TRAILS
The Glenlivet launches three historic smuggling trails



The Glenlivet Distillery in Speyside and The Crown Estate are taking a step back in time to launch three historic walks in the beautiful surroundings of the Glenlivet valley to give visitors a flavour of its illicit whisky smuggling past.

The launch of The Glenlivet Smugglers' Trails is the second phase in a journey to rediscover the heritage of Scotch whisky and that of its most famous glen. It follows on from last year's historic licensing of the first illicit 'sma' still' in Glenlivet for nearly 180 years.

Launched in partnership with The Crown Estate, owners of the surrounding Glenlivet Estate, keen walkers can follow in the footsteps of famous whisky smugglers like the legendary Robbie MacPherson, who distilled whisky in the remote climate and terrain of Glenlivet away from the prying eyes of excise men, before smuggling it out of the glen¹. Robbie MacPherson was not alone and at one time there were over 200 illicit stills operating in the glen due to economic hardship and a series of whisky taxes imposed by the British government.²

The whisky produced by the illicit distillers of Glenlivet became the most sought after in the land and was renowned throughout for its fruity, sweet 'pineapple' taste and gentleness³. Convoys of ponies carrying casks of the outlawed spirit followed the smugglers' trails out of the glen to major cities like Perth and beyond. The smugglers trails were often treacherous and impassible due to snow or flooding.

Visitors can choose from three walks* in the Glenlivet valley of varying length, from a family walk, to a one day hike to explore the secret smuggling paths of days gone by. The trails include: the 6km **George Smith** Smugglers Trail, the 11km **Robbie MacPherson** Smugglers Trail or the 10.5km **Malcolm Gillespie** Smugglers Trail. Each trail is clearly sign-posted and has its own accompanying leaflet available from the visitors centre at the distillery to bring its history to life.

Alan Winchester, Chivas Brothers malt distilleries manager said: "We are delighted to launch The Glenlivet Smugglers' Trails and we are keen to encourage visitors to try out the walks to get a taste of The Glenlivet's smuggling history and enjoy the fantastic scenery. These newly created trails enable visitors to Glenlivet to experience how whisky was transported by the illicit distillers of old."

"The smuggling community made a huge impact on Scottish single malt whisky production and we have learnt a lot from their original methods of distillation. To this day The Glenlivet retains the fruity, pineapple notes and unique softness first associated with illegal Glenlivet spirit of the 19th century."

Such was the quality and reputation of the Glenlivet spirit, that during a visit to Scotland in 1822, King George IV requested a dram of the illegal Glenlivet and then is reported to have said he would drink nothing else from then on⁴.

Amongst those suspected to have used the trails to smuggle illicit whisky out of Glenlivet was George Smith, a tenant farmer on what was then the Duke of Gordon's estate. When, in 1823, a new Excise Act enabled small distillers to operate legally, George Smith was granted the first licence for Glenlivet. Determined to improve on the already acclaimed whisky of the 'sma' stills', he founded the Glenlivet Distillery and created his original single malt.

Andrew Wells, Countryside & Forestry Manager for The Crown Estate said, "The Glenlivet Estate has a fascinating history much of which is associated with its past connection to illicit whisky distilling. This history, combined with a picturesque landscape of wide open spaces and rolling hills make it a truly memorable place to visit. The Crown Estate has made a considerable investment by providing footpaths and trails to help visitors explore and enjoy the Glenlivet countryside. This project has added to the already extensive network of walking trails and we look forward to welcoming more visitors who wish to experience not only the whisky but also to learn more about the people and places that make the area so popular".

The Glenlivet Smugglers' Trails are the perfect way to enjoy the beautiful remote Scottish scenery and the great outdoors. By following in the footsteps of the whisky smugglers visitors can explore the untamed beauty of Glenlivet and relive its spirited past.

References:

1. Robbie and his fellow Glenrinnies distillers would smuggle the spirit they had made in winter to ports such as Banff and Buckie during the summer months in well organised convoys, with whisky hidden among legitimate goods such as sacks of barley and bales of wool (Gavin Smith, *The Secret Still* pg. 80).
2. Smuggling was "the principal trade of the country... it was patronised by the great and the small, and even Justices of the Peace connived at it. Most of the inhabitants of Glenlivet were engaged in the trade in one way or another. A horse load was generally about 15 gallons. We sold it to publicans and spirit dealers. These generally sent out men to the outskirts of the towns to take it in. These men were called "Blethermen" as they carried skins to convey it in. They were authorised to take charge and to pay the price of it to us. The price varied according to the demand and we settled the price with these Blethermen who were middlemen acting for the

publicans."(James Grant, Smuggler, Croftbain, Glenlivet. Taken from a sworn affidavit stored in the The National Archive. London)

3. The new Speyside distilleries were often merely imitators; at Craigellachie, for instance, "The Glenlivet" characteristics, which were much admired, were reproduced - namely, the "pineapple" flavour which was the original old Glenlivet style from the sma' still days. (C. Tovey, British and Foreign Spirits, 1864).

4. I believe that there are some people in the higher situations of life who prefer the Glenlivet whiskey, and who would almost pay any price for it (John Stein, licensed distiller, 1822).

Notes

- Before distilling was largely legalised by the Excise Act of 1823, there were hundreds of illicit stills hidden away in the hills of Glenlivet
- Once the Act was passed, George Smith built the first legal Glenlivet Distillery to legitimately continue making the whisky he'd been furtively distilling for years
- The Glenlivet is owned by Chivas Brothers, the Scotch whisky business of international drinks company, Pernod Ricard
- The Glenlivet is the No. 2 Scottish malt whisky in the world and No.1 in the USA.

***The Smugglers' Trails**

George Smith Smugglers Trail

Following the River Livet to Drumin Castle

Distance: 6km

Route: Easy walking

George Smith battled against formidable odds to produce his whisky. In addition to the hostile climate and terrain, he had to fight off the unreformed whisky smugglers whose illegal livelihood his new distillery undermined. There were numerous threats against his life and he was forced to carry pistols for protection.

Starting at The Glenlivet Distillery, the trail follows the River Livet ("Smooth-flowing One") to the remains of Drumin Castle, built in the 14th century by the Earl of Buchan, the notorious "Wolf of Badenoch". The route also passes the former home of George Smith, whose knowledge of the glen and its natural whisky-making resources was unrivalled.

Robbie MacPherson Smugglers Trail

Leading to Carn Daimh via the old Glenlivet distillery

Distance: 11km

Route: Challenging in places

The trail from The Glenlivet Distillery leads past the natural underground spring of Josie's Well, out of which bubbles hourly 3,500 gallons of priceless, pure, ice-cold water for making the whisky. The route continues to the site of George Smith's original distillery in Upper Drumin, before taking in Carn Daimh (summit 570m) and the 16th-century Blairfindy Castle.

This was all familiar territory to one of Glenlivet's most renowned whisky smugglers, Robbie MacPherson. During the longer winter months, MacPherson would store his illicit whisky in camouflaged pits dug in the hillside. When the snows thawed the more mature, smoother spirit would be ready for transportation out of the glen.

Malcolm Gillespie Smugglers Trail

Starting at East Auchavaich car park and circuiting the Braes of Glenlivet

Distance: 10.5km

Route: For serious walkers only

As enforcers of a despised law excisemen (or gaugers, as they were called) had few friends among the outlaw community. One officer who commanded respect, however, was Malcolm Gillespie. Fearless and relentless in his pursuit of smugglers, he bore the scars of no less than 42 wounds sustained in the course of duty.

The Braes of Glenlivet embrace the wildest and most isolated parts of the glen. For many smugglers it was a safe haven, since it was the least accessible to excisemen. The trail from East Auchavaich passes through a ruggedly beautiful landscape, habitat to red and roe deer, the mountain hare, curlew, snipe, red and black grouse, among others.