

moderate

2 or 4 hours

3½ miles/5.6km

## Where deer roam

Glen Muick lies south of Balmoral at the foot of Prince Charles' favourite mountain, Lochnagar. It is an enormous U-shaped valley, with a deep loch that mirrors the surrounding mountains. The area is a red deer reserve and you will be very unlucky not to see stags and hinds grazing on the flats below the loch or on the surrounding hillsides. The walk passes moorland, forest and even a stunning beach. In spring and summer the heather is full of wild flowers.

and are joined by the path from the far side. The track rises slightly to a sign for the old drove road over Capel Mouth Road to Glen Clova. Keep straight ahead, passing above a grassy area popular with deer, until you reach the car park.

**3 2 miles/3.2km** Otherwise continue straight on above the boathouse on a well-built track with a retaining stone wall on the upper side. After a bridge over a rushing burn, birch trees grow below the track and the air is filled with birdsong. There is an increasingly impressive view of the mountains, including Broad Cairn, above the head of the loch. Keep on the track until, at Glas-allt-Shiel, it takes you through encircling walls into the peace of a pinewood carpeted in bilberry and moss.

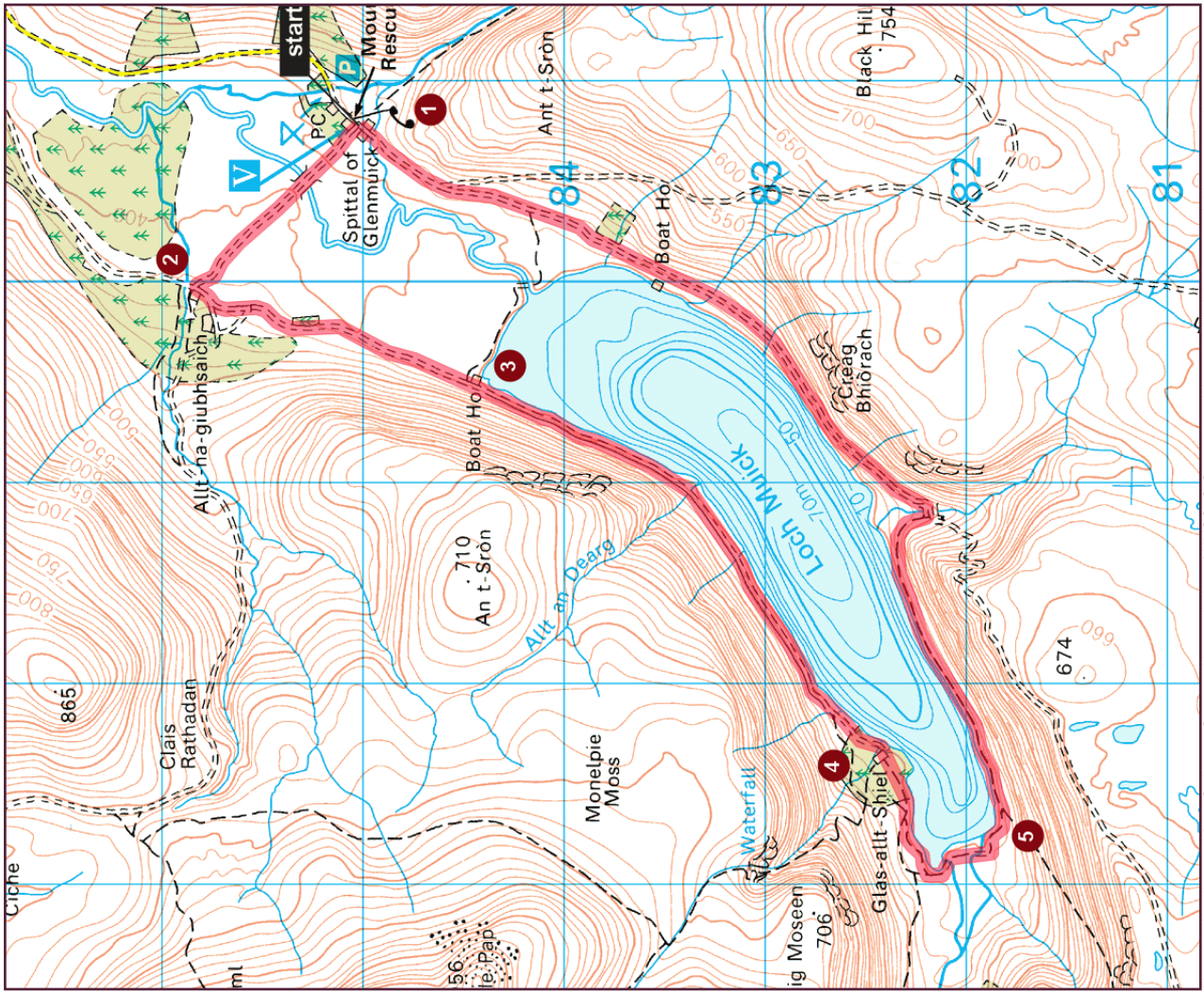
## The walk

**1 Start** Leave the car park and turn left on to a track that is a continuation of the road. Cross a burn and walk past a grassy picnic area to a small stand of mature Scots pines. There is a toilet block in the trees, then the ranger centre, with walkers' information in the windows and wildlife displays inside. Just beyond, turn right along the edge of the wood. Then cross a wide, open area. The track, with a good surface of fine pink gravel, takes you over the River Muick and through a marshy area – look closely for wildflowers.

**2 1 mile/1.6km** You join another track on the far side, near a stone shooting lodge surrounded by rhododendrons. Turn left rather than going up to the house. On your way to the loch you pass the bizarre sight of a lone kissing gate once attached to a long-gone fence. As you approach the water a gravelly path diverges to the left, to go along the shore and join the

**4 3¼ miles/6km** Cross the lawns in front of the big lodge and bend right beyond to pick up a path through the trees parallel to the loch. Leave the shelter of the wood and in 150 yards left on a path that runs round a bay at the loch head and crosses a bridge over the first inlet stream. It continues along the head of the loch, but it is worth leaving it to visit the lovely white beach. Beyond, the path goes around the corner and climbs a bit to continue back down the far shore. It is soon joined by another path from the corrie above.

**5 4¼ miles/7.6km** The narrow path is now rocky in places. As you climb up into a side valley there are splendid views up and down the loch. Join a track and turn left on to it, crossing a bridge over the Black Burn. Near the end of the loch you walk below a small plantation



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