

MONARCH OF THE GLEN COUNTRY

Experience the real drama on your Highland holiday adventure in Aviemore and the Cairngorms

It's the series that brought the stunning beauty of the Highland landscape, and the charms of the people and communities which characterise Aviemore and the Cairngorms, to our TV screens.

Monarch of the Glen, the BBC TV series, produced by Ecosse Films, makes the glorious surroundings of pine forests, lochs, mountains and abundant wildlife familiar sights in millions of homes around the world as viewers in over twenty-three countries tune in for the timeless appeal of the programme.

Now, such has been the worldwide appeal of the long-running television drama set in this natural and romantic environment that fans of the drama and the location are being drawn in increasing numbers to visit and experience the reality of Monarch Country in Aviemore and the Cairngorms.

Followers of the series have taken to visiting the real scenes and locations where the fictional events and characters have so vividly lived their lives in the seven series of the BBC production. At its very centre is the Highland community of Laggan, where the village shops and cottages, even the local Highland games field, share celebrity status with the Victorian grandeur of neighbouring **Ardverikie House**, home of the laird Macdonald and his family. In the series both share the name Glenbogle, however in real life they offer very different charms of their own. Laggan is a vibrant and welcoming farming and outdoors community, while the stunning loch-side properties of Ardverikie estate offer the peace of its splendid isolation.

A real slice of Glenbogle-style outdoors life can be sampled throughout the beautiful, visitor-friendly **Rothiemurchus Estate** whose 9,700 hectares encompass all the natural wonders of the Highland landscape - from the ancient island castle of Loch an Eilean to the ancient Caledonian woods climbing high into the Cairngorm mountains. Fans of the series might enjoy that extra tingle and feeling instantly at home - and no wonder, since much of the life and landscape of Rothiemurchus was woven into some of Monarch's most memorable scenes and storylines.

From that very first moment when Archie arrived home aboard the **Strathspey Railway** (which runs from Aviemore to Broomhill) to reclaim his birthright, the features and landscape of the Aviemore and the Cairngorms have become familiar friends in households around the world. During filming, such was the affection between the cast and crew and the people throughout the area that the off duty production cast became part of the local scene, enjoying the same hospitality and activities which attract so many returning visitors.

The cast of Monarch were often to be found at **Loch Insh Watersports**, "rehearsing" in the excellent bar and restaurant or just enjoying some free time out on the loch trying any of the many water-based activities taught here. If water is not your thing, then there are plenty of dry challenges from archery to dry-slope skiing or the adventure of exploring the miles and miles of pine forest tracks by mountain bike as alternatives.

For the pure activity enthusiast the going gets serious at **Glenmore Lodge**, Scotland's National Outdoor Training Centre set by Loch Morlich. Here the goal is to inspire adventure, and you can learn, develop or qualify in an adventure sport of your choice, such as kayaking, canoeing, rock climbing, ice climbing, navigation skills, winter/summer mountain skills, ski touring/mountaineering and mountain biking.

For a more cosy Highland experience the village of **Nethy Bridge**, is another place you'll find proud of its natural backdrop. Around its Caledonian Pine woodlands the legendary gamekeeper Golly taught Archie the art of stalking Scotland's giant woodland grouse, whose beautiful black plumage, ostentatious fan tail and loud echoing call is hauntingly captured in its Gaelic name capercaillie, meaning "*Great Horse Of The Woods*".

Anywhere here, in the course of a morning, you could see a steam train wind through the valley; preparations being made for a Highland Games gathering; or local Shinty teams out training for the next big head to head in the unique Highland sport of Camanachd; or visit ruined Castle Roy long abandoned, according to legend, because the treasure buried beneath is tainted with a deadly plague.

Wildlife celebrated so dramatically in TV close-ups of majestic red deer stags, wildcat, eagles and even wolves is even more plentiful in reality. At the **Highland Wildlife Park**, near the village of Kinraig, you can meet the same pack of native wolves which were the stars in their own storyline during one series.

Perhaps the osprey, the graceful bird of prey seen in the opening titles of the programme, is the best-known creature on screen and in reality thanks to the decades of publicity derived from the celebrated **RSPB Loch Garten Visitor Centre**. Here thousands of spectators come back year after year to see the birds mate, rear their chicks and hunt fish from the loch for the youngsters, all relayed live by CCTV to the viewing hide.

Further up the strath, Kingussie, whose Gaelic name means "the head of the pinewood", is another great magnet for Monarch spotters as the town hall doubles for Glenbogle. Here the real life of the area is celebrated and recreated in the **Highland Folk Museum**, based here and at Newtonmore, which provides a living window looking back through the centuries.

Sport is a proud tradition here, from the draw of the mountains on either side to the challenges of playing an 18 hole hillside golf course which rises to 1,000 ft above sea level. Shinty pitches abound on the flat plain of Strath Spey where the ancient rivalry between Kingussie and Newtonmore produce a stirring and passionate sporting occasion.

Monarch Country lies within the 1400 square miles designated as the **Cairngorms National Park**, one of the last great wild places in Europe. At its heart is the huge haunch of Cairngorm Mountain, the roof of Scotland, where visitors of all ages and abilities can travel with ease on the spectacular **Cairngorm Mountain Railway**, which carries passengers all year round to take in the unparalleled views over the valley below. Having feasted the eyes it's only right to indulge the taste buds with a hearty meal in the Ptarmigan, Britain's highest restaurant, before the descent.

As if to complement nature's wonders and the great outdoors, the area also has its own capital, Aviemore, for folk who like a day on the hill to end with a night on the town. At its heart is the new **Macdonald Aviemore Highland Resort**, where state of the art hotels, leisure facilities, shopping and restaurants provide the very best in indoor indulgences. And nearby, the **Hilton Coylumbridge** is a natural hub for family holidays with its fun and leisure facilities nestling in the peace of the Caledonian pine forest.

You don't need a director and film crew to bring your own escapist adventure to life in this very special part of the world. 'Action' can just as much mean browsing the fabulous shops in Grantown-on-Spey, watching the reindeer herd roam across Cairngorm, or, as like Archie and Katrina, just row gently across atmospheric **Loch An Eilean** to the island castle where the romance of real life, real history and the magic of the screen combine to bring your dreams to life.

In such a magnificent, inspiring and motivating setting as Monarch Country, who's to say you won't find yourself becoming part of the storyline for years to come.

Check out www.visitaviemore.com for more detailed information on what to see and do, where to stay and short breaks in Aviemore and the Cairngorms.

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Following in Archie's Footsteps

Photographs of the area and attractions are available from the **Keith** consultancy on 01463 811000 or info@thekeithconsultancy.co.uk

Getting there is easy. Every day and overnight, direct trains from London and the East Coast deliver visitors to Aviemore. Frequent services also connect with trains at Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Inverness is the nearest airport, leaving a beautiful drive south by the rugged A9 or back country roads. Flights to Edinburgh, Glasgow or Aberdeen are all within a few hours reach.

Driving north, the A9 leads from Perth, right through the region. A detour on to the A86 Fort William road takes in Scotland's most popular lay-by, on the banks of Loch Laggan, overlooking the beach and Glenbogle house at Ardverikie.