

Water of Life

Speyside is a landscape of whiskies and waters. As much as the malt whisky trail it is famous for, swimming around Speyside is a delightful way to explore the area, says **Susanne Masters**

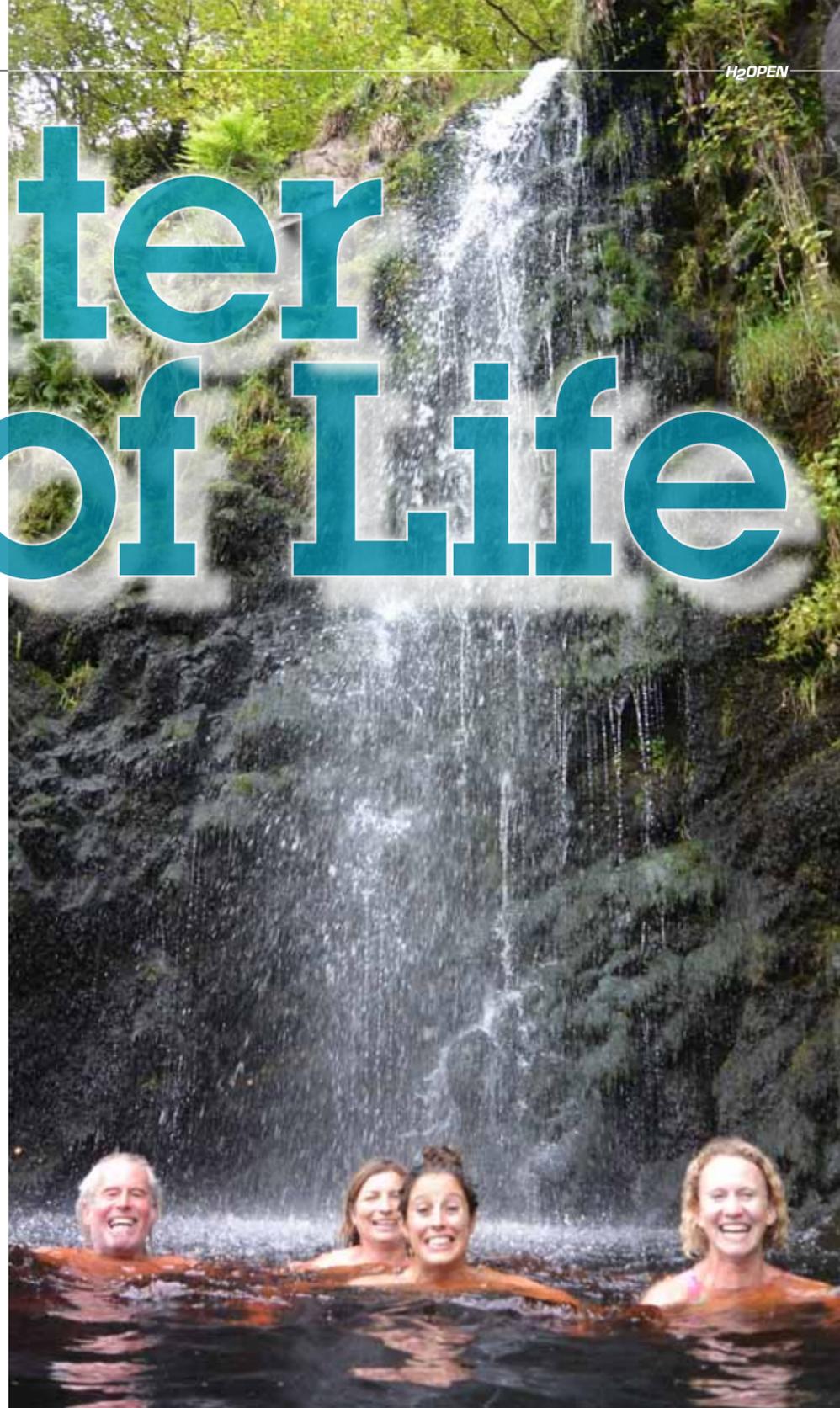
The word 'whisky' is a word derived from the Gaelic *uisge beatha*, meaning water of life. Speyside whiskies are shaped by the granite Grampian Mountains that give rise to soft water. These granite mountains also cradle lochs and provide plenty of river pools and waterfalls that then merge into wider slower swoops of river. The landscape is a playground for outdoor swimmers as well as a source of whisky.

LOCHS Castle swims

Eilein Castle is on an island just a 50-metre swim from the shore of Loch an Eilein. This sheltered loch is set in a forest and swimming to the castle is not too tough. By contrast Lochindorb Castle on an island in Lochindorb is more of a challenge. Lochindorb Castle is 300 metres from the shore, and Lochindorb is exposed on higher ground without sheltering trees. This makes swimming to Lochindorb Castle and back more suited to good weather in summer.

Best freshwater beach

Despite being very much inland and brimming with freshwater, Loch Morlich feels like a seaside experience with its generous 1km of sandy beach. In June, snow can still be seen on surrounding



IF YOU SKINNY DIP HERE BE AWARE YOU MAY BE SPOTTED BY WALKERS WHO STOP AT THE VIEWPOINT ABOVE THE WATERFALL

mountain tops. It is big enough to accommodate a water sports centre – so if going for a long distance swim be mindful that there may also be sailing boats, windsurfers, canoeists and kayakers enjoying the water.

The Green Loch

Much Speyside swimming is through water tinted the colour of whisky by tannins from trees. Tannin is one of the flavour and colour elements added to whisky via the wood barrels that whisky matures in. A striking exception to Speyside's golden brown waters is Lochan Uaine, also known as the Green Loch. According to legend the water colour is due to pixies washing their clothes in it. A more boring explanation attributes its colour to mineral content. Pixies or not, it certainly is a magical loch, only half an hour walk up the mountain from the nearest parking spot, spot but watch out for the branches of submerged trees.



LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

The lower reaches of the River Spey are popular with anglers but salmon fishing is not allowed on Sundays, which makes it the best day to swim. On some rivers, canoeists and anglers are asked to ensure that they have rinsed equipment if it has recently been used in a different river in order to reduce the spread of fish diseases and parasites. Follow their example and make sure your swimming kit is rinsed, or keep separate sets of kit for different rivers and lochs.

To get there, drive south of Aviemore and past Loch Morlich on your right. Go through Glenmore and take the road to the left following signs for Glenmore Lodge. Park where the road ends at the foot of a well-marked track through the forest, which leads to Green Loch.

Sunset swim

Loch Insh's northern end, near Insh church, is perfect for a mellow sunset swim – it is open and unshaded even when the sun is well past its zenith. The loch is shallow and has a muddy bottom – swim southwest past the island to find deeper water. Alternatively, swim out of the north end of the loch into the river Spey with a tow float for clothes or leave them hidden downstream.

RIVERS

In Scotland deer stalkers and anglers use ghillies – personal hunting or fishing assistants with expert local knowledge. On one of our swims in the Spey, which is renowned for salmon fishing





we met a friendly ghillie. He spotted us from the opposite bank, waved and brought out a thermometer to measure the water temperature. At the end of September on a hot day of sunshine the river was still only 11 degrees Celsius, so be aware of the risks of cold water when swimming in local rivers.

River Feshie

A good swimming spot upstream of the Spey is in one of its tributaries, the River Feshie at Feshiebridge on the B970. It is easiest to get in the water from the gently sloping bank just downstream of the bridge in Feshiebridge. Swim upstream into a large river pool and swim hard when it almost becomes an endless pool as the river narrows towards the bridge. Renowned for its clear water it is also a charming combination of bridge and dappled light from trees. Best of all it is close to the Potting Shed Tearoom and its array of amazing cakes.

River Pattack and River Truim

Dalwhinnie is located within the southern edge of Speyside but marketed as a Highland whisky. It is Scotland's highest distillery and near it are two lovely river swims.

In Strathmashie Forest go to Drum An Aird car park on the A86 just south of Strathmashie House. From here a path leads through the forest and past a wide pool in the River Pattack, which is topped with a small waterfall. If you skinny dip here be aware you may be spotted by walkers

who stop at the viewpoint above the waterfall.

In contrast to the shelter of the forest and wide pool in Strathmashie is the deep water of the narrow River Truim where it dashes under a bridge before going over the falls of Truim. Head from Dalwhinnie to Aviemore on the A9, watching out for the easily missed turn off to the Falls of

Truim on the east side of the road just before Etteridge. Park in the small car park and then walk down to the bridge where you can get into the river. Post-swimming, if you have a designated driver, stop for the distillery tour and whisky tasting at Dalwhinnie.

River Findhorn

Well known for white water kayaking, the Findhorn also has some good spots for swimmers. At Dulsie the river runs through a rocky gorge.

On the downstream side of Dulsie bridge walk along a path through the vegetation to access the water. On the opposite bank and a little downstream of the access point there is a waterfall. It is chilly Scottish water but, set among green ferns growing on the rocks, it looks tropical.

Another swim spot in the Findhorn is just after its confluence with the River Divvie. Near the bridge over the Divvie on the B9007 just south of Logie a footpath passes along the edge of a field, through forest and leads you to where the two rivers meet. Just downstream of this is a small sandy beach where it is easy to get in the water. Swim upstream to the rock islands, which are perfect for clambering up for a view of the river. Here the forest surrounding the river is largely composed of beech and oak, the whisky barrel's favourite.

PRACTICALITIES

LOCAL ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

Inshriach House is great for groups with a large budget. Accommodates up to 17 in the house, with additional outdoor accommodation and a wood fired sauna next to the Spey. For those tired of whisky, this estate is also the home of the juniper berries used in Crossbill Gin. inshriachhouse.com

Wild camp in the forest at Glenmore – with the benefit of toilets, showers, shop, cafe and sauna. spanglefish.com/campingintheforestglenmore

Alternatively, for those who don't require home comforts, you could seek out a bothie (a basic mountain shelter). Ryvoan bothy is just up the mountain from Lochan Uaine. mountainbothies.org.uk



LOOK OUT FOR

- Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival 28 April – 2 May 2016
- The Book of the Bothy by Phoebe Smith
- Potting Shed Tearoom inshriachnursery.co.uk/the-potting-shed-tearoom