

# **Walk Wester Ross**

**50+ walks**

**Loch Torridon to Little Loch Broom**

**This guide describes most of the worthwhile low-level walks in the central part of Wester Ross, from Torridon to Dundonnell.** Most visitors and settlers in Wester Ross are attracted by the outdoors – sea, moor, wood, loch, hill, river – and walking is the best way to experience it. (For the mountains, see the guide “Hills of Wester Ross”.)

First, a gentle warning... This is a rough wild land with a lot of weather, and the walks reflect this: few are really easy. Most of the walks are on paths or tracks, but don't expect all these to be as flat and well-surfaced as in the lowlands. Hazards may include bracken, heather, mud, bog or slippery rocks. A few pathless walks are included where careful micro-navigation is needed at certain points: these points are highlighted with a red line at the side.

But don't be put off! The weather is often good, and this is a great area for walking. Go slowly with your eyes open to see all that nature has to offer: wildflowers and plants of all kinds from trees to mosses and lichens, birds and other animals, insects, lochs (lakes) and burns (streams), ancient rocks, beautiful and spectacular scenery. And in many places there are ruins, traces of the human past from prehistoric round-houses to former crofting townships and evidence of old agriculture.

The walks are arranged in 13 groups as on the map opposite. In addition to the 50 main walks, more difficult or longer extensions are often described.

**Grades.** An attempt has been made to grade the walks as below (for example, **B 3**). The Effort grade is, of course, subjective: it depends on how fit and footsure you are.

PATHS		EFFORT		In the walk descriptions, few value judgements such as 'lovely' or 'spectacular' have been used: add these yourselves!
<b>A</b>	good paths	<b>1</b>	short, easy	
<b>B</b>	mixed paths	<b>2</b>	good exercise	
<b>C</b>	unsurfaced paths	<b>3</b>	quite tiring	
<b>D</b>	no paths	<b>4</b>	very tiring	
<b>E</b>	rough ground	<b>5</b>	exhausting	

**Length and Height Climbed** for each walk are given. Using these you can estimate the average time needed: usually about 4 kilometres per hour plus a minute for each 10 metres climbed. But of course times depend on the terrain, your speed, and how often you stop. The **Grid Reference** of the start of each walk is given. **x2** means that you have to return the same way, walking twice the distance. A few walks need transport at both ends.

**Suggested kit** (*depending on the time of year, weather, and walk chosen*): The right footwear is vital: this may be shoes if the ground is dry and the walking easy, boots if it is wet or rough, or wellies if it is very wet. Waterproof jacket and trousers, warm clothing including hat and gloves, camera, binoculars, basic first aid kit, anti-midge ointment (May-September), mobile phone (but reception is unreliable), map (paper or electronic), food and drink, walking poles if you use them.

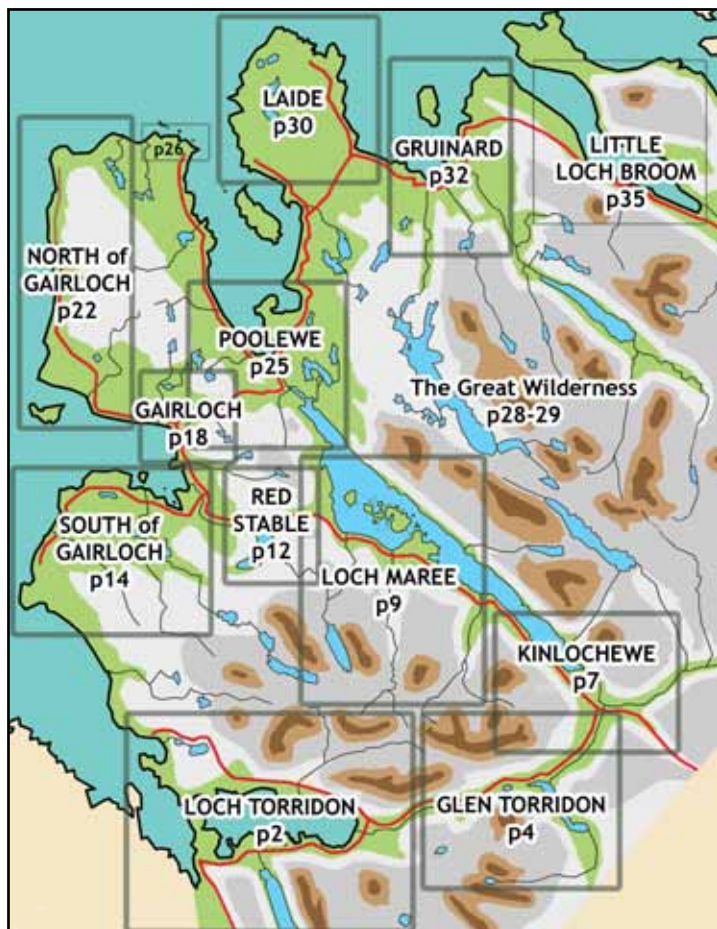
**Scottish Access Law** (*see page 36*) entitles you to walk anywhere (with certain common sense exceptions such as private gardens): you do not have to keep to paths. But in exchange you are expected to show consideration for the land, its owners and local people: especially remember that **sheep are afraid of dogs**, and use a lead when necessary.

**You attempt the routes described in this guide at your own risk.**

## Maps

The sketch maps in this booklet give a rough idea of the routes, but their scale varies. For many of the walks an Ordnance Survey (OS) map is useful, and for some it is essential. The printed OS 1:50,000 sheet 19 (Gairloch) covers most of the area, but the south is split between sheets 24 and 25. You may prefer an electronic map or a print-out.

**To find out more** about this area, visit Gairloch Museum, or consult other booklets in this series: *Wester Ross Rocks* on the geology which underlies the landscape, *Wild Wester Ross* on the living world of plants and animals, *The Story of Gairloch* for the history.



*The front cover picture is on Walk 4, with Beinn Dearg*

## Paths and Tracks

- Many paths were made by the various estates from about 1850 onwards for use by stalkers of red deer. At this time landowners found that they could make a larger income from letting land ('deer forests') and accommodation ('shooting lodges') to these hunters than from the sheep farms which had earlier been popular. The paths were built by estate workers to a high standard for stalkers and ponies. But not all are maintained these days when cross-country vehicles are preferred.
- Several organisations have built or maintained paths in the past 50 years: the National Trust for Scotland in Torridon, Scottish Natural Heritage (now NatureScot) at Beinn Eighe, the Footpath Trust (Highland Council and the landowners working together) around 1990, and Scottish Forestry in Slattadale.
- Vehicle tracks include some sections of old single-track road, and estate access routes for fishermen and stalkers. Recently tracks have been built for small hydro-electric schemes, and there are traces of the routes used in the creation of native tree plantation schemes (which unfortunately may also involve hard-to-cross deer fences).
- Animals are also good at making useful paths, especially deer and sheep.



# LOCH TORRIDON

## 1. Shildaig Peninsula

*Start: School NG 8162 5437*

*Grade **A/C 2**, Length 4 km, Up 80 m*

*Sea loch and mountain views*

Park somewhere in Shildaig village and walk to the start, at the right of the Primary School, near the campsite. The track soon runs through woodland above the shore. Note the rustling aspen trees, and the rock which here is 3100 million-year-old Lewisian Gneiss.

The track loops to the east, but at a big cairn there is a possible short-cut left on a rough rocky path (marked **M**). The track ends at two houses, modern and old, at the NW corner of the peninsula. Near the houses several small paths lead left to viewpoints over Outer Loch Torridon and Eilean a' Chaol ('island of the narrows', *right*). Then follow the FP signs on a rough path below the modern house and up beyond it using a chain at one point. The path continues east, unclear in places, avoiding another house and finally reaching a grass track which leads back to the main track. The views are now of Upper Loch Torridon and its encircling hills. Follow the track back to the start.



## 2. Loch Torridon South Shore

*Start: Torridon Inn NG 889 542 (parking)*

*Grade **B 2**, Length 8.5 km, Up 40 m*

*Woodland track and coast with mountain views*

Start to the left of the Inn, through a courtyard, past a Giant Redwood, over a bridge, and follow a gravel track signposted to Balgy. This was the private estate road along the loch (the A896 link road was only opened in 1961). A major *Rhododendron ponticum* clearance scheme has been completed here; re-growth is being treated. After 2 km you reach a gate and track leading to an award-winning modern house on the first peninsula. Ignore this and continue to a bay and an unusual former gateway. Beyond this turn right on a second track with a gate. It soon passes through a rocky ravine. Continue until just before a sharp bend right: a small footpath turns left. This leads through birch woodland and round the coast with views across to the Torridon hills, with Beinn Alligin prominent. Reach a cottage, and to the left a former fishing station: fish were hoisted up from boats to the building where they were processed. Take the track from the cottage, and soon after a left bend look out for another small footpath left. This eventually leads (turning left at a junction) to a footbridge and steps up to the Inn track. Return along this. It is worth diverting at a sign to the Hotel, where a rough path leads down to the shore, and a track takes you back to the Inn.



### 3. Circuit of Beinn na h-Eaglaise

*Start: Torridon Inn NG 889 542 (parking)*

*Grade **A/D 4**, Length 13 km, Up 420 m*

*A lengthy varied walk through hill country via Loch an Eoin: NB river crossing*

This walk is mostly on paths but with a crucial river crossing and a stretch of off-path walking. It is anti-clockwise, in case the river crossing is not possible. A map is useful. Start to the left of the Inn, through a courtyard, past a Giant Redwood, over a bridge, and turn left on a footpath with a sign 'Beinn Damh'. Cross the main road with care, and continue opposite on a path climbing through pinewood. After the last trees ignore the path right (up Beinn Damh). Beyond this there used to be a bridge over the river, but now you have to find a rocky and preferably jump-able crossing place a little upstream: not easy. Re-join the path, which climbs gently to the pass called Drochaid Coire Roill. Here the hill straight ahead is Maol Chean-dearg ('bald red-head'), a Munro. Descend the path for about 200m after the lochan, then turn left and leave it: you now have to strike cross-country heading due east, choosing your route with care, to meet another path which follows the foot of Maol Chean-dearg and reaches Loch an Eoin ('loch of the bird'). This path takes you past the loch, whose outflow stream you cross twice, and turns north past two lochans and along the foot of the hill which you are circling, 'hill of the church'. The path finally reaches the road at the village of Annat. The Inn is a short walk left along the road.



*Looking down on the route, from Beinn Damh*

### 4. Coire MhicNobaill

*Start: Beinn Alligin car park NG 868 576*

*Grade **A 1**, Length 2 km x2, Up 100 m*

*Pine wood, river and hill views*

### Circuit of Liathach

*Total: Grade **B 4**, Length 12 km, Up 360 m*

*Optional major extension to Glen Torridon*

The popular car park is used mostly by climbers heading for Beinn Alligin, but it is worth following the first part of the path for its own sake. Cross the bridge and turn left on a footpath through pine trees with the river below. Beyond the wood continue as far as a river junction where there is a bridge (see front cover). Return the same way, or...

**Circuit of Liathach:** Needs transport at both ends. Cross the footbridge and turn right. Follow the path all the way to the Glen Torridon car park (see Walk 5), following the glen between Beinn Dearg and Liathach, and then between Beinn Eighe and Liathach.

**OTHER ROUTES** north of Loch Torridon (dotted lines on the map): **a** and **b** are circuits but include a lot of road; **c** and **d** need transport at both ends.

- a. Loch Torridon North Shore** (**A 3**, 7 km, 110 m): park at Beinn Alligin car park, walk road back to Loch Torridon, coastal estate road, track and footpath to Inveralligin, up to road.
- b. Diabaig coast** (**C 4**, 12 km, 300 m): a rough path from Diabaig to Wester Alligin, needing a map, with a lot of road-walking to make a circuit. Navigation is tricky at Diabaig.
- c. Loch Torridon to Loch Gairloch** (**E 5**, 21 km): the reverse of Walk 24 and its extension.
- d. To Craig and Red Point** (**B 3**, 13 km, 160 m): the reverse of Walk 27 and its extension.

# GLEN TORRIDON

## 5. Coire Mhic Fhearchair

Start: car park NG 957 568

Grade **A 4**, Length 7 km x2, Up 520 m

Mountain scenery + a famous corrie

This is a popular area for walkers and climbers, and the large car park is often full (roadside parking is also available). The path is good, though rough in places as it climbs steadily up to the col between Liathach and Beinn Eighe. Cross a burn on stepping stones. Keep right as the well-made path circles Sail Mhor, one of the spurs of Beinn Eighe. You are here at the heart of the Torridon range of hills. Finally the path climbs up to the lip of the corrie (pronounced *corra veek errakhar*). To the right are Sail Mhor's cliffs and gullies with their scree fans, to the left Beinn Eighe's summit ridge, and ahead beyond the loch the famous Triple Buttress, 350m high. This shows clearly the join between darker Sandstone and pale Quartzite. Return the same way.

**Extension.** It is worth continuing to the far end of the loch if you don't mind rough off-path walking. The left side is easier. Only traverse the right side if you are confident about crossing the unstable scree slopes. Below the Triple Buttress are the remains of an aircraft, a Lancaster bomber, which crashed in 1951.



## 6. The Hundred Hills

Start: car park NG 957 568

Grade **B 1**, Length 2.5 km x2, Up 120 m

Short walk on a small path, one exposed part

Two long extensions possible: see page 6 map

From the same car park as Walk 1 above, cross the road bridge and then climb over the barrier onto a small path down to a footbridge. The path leads to the Ling Hut (Scottish Mountaineering Club) with views of Liathach and Beinn Eighe across the glen, and then follows a burn. After a brief steep climb above a waterfall, with some exposure on the right, it traverses the foot of Coire a' Cheud-Chnoc ('corrie of a hundred hills'). This is a complex area of glacial 'hummocky moraines' (the best in the UK), with perhaps more than 100 little hills, some of which you may feel like climbing. There are three rocky burn crossings to negotiate. If you want a short walk, return the same way from the third burn.



Lochan an Iasgair and the Ling Hut

**Extensions.** If it is a fine day and you want a long strenuous walk, here are two options (both are shown on the map on page 6, but you also need an OS map):

**a. To Lochan Uaine ('green lochs') :** Grade **E 5**, Total length 5.5 km x2, Up 530 m

This rough walk takes you to a lonely spot high in the hills with rock and loch scenery. Continue along the path for about 2.5km, until it becomes less clear. Then turn left, leaving the path, and head straight uphill across moorland with careful route choice, aiming for the col between two hills, Sgorr nan Lochan Uaine on the left and Beinn Liath Mhor on the right. At the end of this climb you will be faced with impressive bare slabs of Torridonian Sandstone. These can be walked up if they are dry. Above them there are two lochans, and beyond that the first of the two Green Lochs (the second is beyond the rock barrier). Return the same way.

**b. To Meall Dearg ('red hill'):** Grade **E 5**, Total length 7 km x2, Up 600 m

This takes you up a small (646 metre) hill with a view. Follow the path to its end and then continue on the same line, south, climbing across the slope to reach the foot of Coire Grannda where you meet another path. Turn right on this path to reach Bealach Ban (the white pass). Meall Dearg is 1km due west and about 100m up. The whole area is worth exploring, enjoying sandstone, lochans, and views. Return the same way, or if transport allows take the same path down to Loch an Eoin and finally to Annat on Loch Torridon (see Walk 3).



From Meall Dearg:

*Sgurr Dubh (left), Sgorr nan Lochan Uaine, Beinn Liath Mhor, Sgorr Ruadh, Fuar Tholl (behind)*

## 7. Lochs Clair and Coulin

*Start: small parking space NH 002 581*

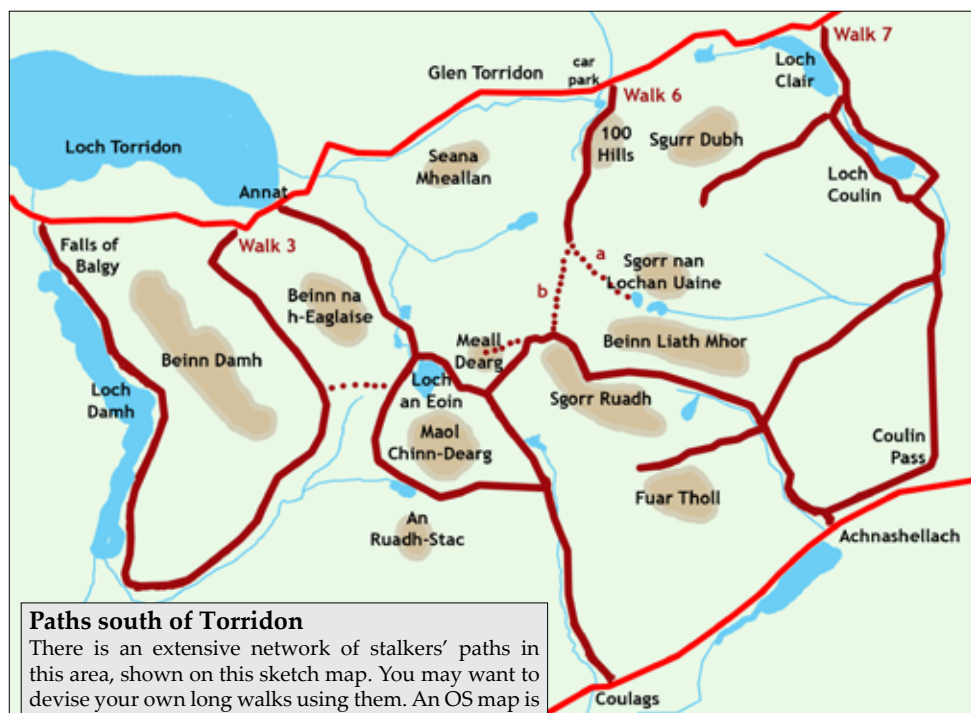
*Grade **A 2**, Length 9 km, Up 20 m*

*Popular walk with trees, lochs and mountain views*



Follow the tarred estate road down to a bridge and Loch Clair, and then along the loch. There are many photographic opportunities on this walk, especially if the water is calm. At a bridge right, go straight ahead through a gate on a gravel track. When this starts to climb, turn right on a footpath along the shore of Loch Coulin: this may be muddy (the track is an alternative, up through forestry). Look out for water birds. After the loch you rejoin the track near a small house, cross a bridge, pass a large house, and follow the east side of the loch, finally entering woodland. On the right you will see Coulin Lodge (keep on the track). The track goes right, past other buildings, and reaches the bridge which you passed early in the walk. Return to the road.





### Paths around Kinlochewe

Kinlochewe is at the meeting of four routes. Geologically it is where the Moine Thrust (NE-SW) is crossed by the major Loch Maree Fault (NW-SE). There are three main starting points for walks (with parking): Incheril, along a minor road from the east end of Kinlochewe, and two Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve (NNR) bases.





# KINLOCHEWE

## 8. River Bruachaig

*Start: Incheril road end car park NH 037 623*

*Grade **A 1**, Length 4 km x2, Up 50 m*

*Track up river, with geological and botanical interest*



From the Incheril car park gate turn right to find the track up the glen. Follow this as far as the house at Heights of Kinlochewe (or return before that as you wish), and return the same way. The best part of the river has been spoilt by a small hydro-electric scheme, but the spate in high water or the rock formations at low water here are still worth seeing. The steep ground across the river to the right is made of Moine Schist, a rock which was carried up to 80 kilometres from the east by the Moine Thrust. To the left, all the rocks have been affected by the Thrust. At first they are limestone-type rocks which were originally laid down about 800 metres above their present position. Limestone fertilises the soil, and the ground is unusually green: enjoy the flowers in season. Further up the glen the rock on your left is mostly Lewisian Gneiss, a 16 square kilometre block of basement rock which was pushed about 50 kilometres west and raised to form the top of Beinn a' Mhuinidh.

## 9. Incheril to Loch Maree

*Start: Incheril road end car park NH 037 623*

*Grade **C 3**, Length 4.5 km x2, Up 40 m*

*Popular path to the foot of Glen Bianasdail*



From the Incheril car park gate turn left and follow a varied but well-trodden path all the way. There are views across to Beinn Eighe, and you pass an ancient cemetery beyond the fence. Bracken may be a nuisance in summer. Once you reach the Kinlochewe River, you are in woodland of alder and oak. If in doubt about the route, keep right to avoid old river channels and bogs. The crossing of one rocky burn needs care. Beinn a' Mhuinidh above has a complicated west face, greatly affected by the Moine Thrust which has pushed rock out of position, 430 million years ago. There is a thin 100-metre waterfall after which the hill is named ('mhuinidh' means 'pissing'!). At last you reach the start of Loch Maree, and soon after that a bridge over the Abhainn an Fhasaigh, your turning point (the bridge needed repair in 2019).

**Extension.** If you want more, a small path leads upstream just after the bridge. It is sometimes exposed, steep or wet. After you leave the trees and the river is at path level, a slabby area beside the river makes a good picnic spot (if it is not flooded!).

### OTHER ROUTES

**a. Lochan Fada (A/E 5, 20km, 400 m).** Extensions of walks 8 and 9 can be combined to make a long arduous circuit via Lochan Fada ('lochan' means 'small loch', but it isn't!). There's a lot of track walking, a tricky river crossing (try boots without socks), and the loch-side path is mostly overgrown (follow the shore). But you are on the fringes of the Great Wilderness.

**b. To Poolewe (B 5, 32 km, 430 m).** Walk 2 can be the start of a long walk to Poolewe. As far as Letterewe much of the path is through bracken in summer, but walkable. See page 29, route 1.

## 10. Below Beinn Eighe

*Start: NNR Visitor Centre car park NH 019 629*

*Grade **B/E 4**, Length 7 km, Up 250 m*

*Paths and a tricky moorland link: map useful*



The Buzzard Path behind the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve Visitor Centre is a straightforward circuit, with views to Slioch and Beinn a' Mhuinidh. A much longer circuit is described here, best when dry. From the right of the Visitor Centre, follow signs for the Buzzard Path and then for the path to Kinlochewe (church symbol). As you approach the village, turn right (viewpoint symbol). At the next junction turn right again. After a footbridge the path narrows. When it meets a track turn right. In trees follow the track round a right-hand uphill bend, and immediately turn left on a path: this follows the Allt a' Chuirn towards Beinn Eighe. In 1 km the path descends to cross a small burn near an isolated pine tree, then climbs again to a wooden post. Soon after the post the path levels off: turn right here, leaving the path and heading straight uphill on stony ground.

Now you cross 1 km of moorland. Pass another post and climb a short steep slope. You can see a low hill straight ahead with a ridge down to its right (*right*: beyond it is the top of Beinn a' Mhuinidh, the hill next to Slioch). Reach the foot of this stony ridge. Go round its foot and bear left. Continue to follow the foot of a slope which has many quartzite slabs, climbing gently and now aiming for Slioch. At the top cross a broad ridge, avoiding peat-hags. Soon you are looking down at the next path. Go down a small corrie, cross the burn below with care, and reach the stony path: the Pony Track. This leads back down to the Visitor Centre, with a left turn at the Buzzard Trail.



**Extension.** The Pony Track continues uphill about 2.5 km from where you joined it, ending at a remote spot in the hills. From its end it is possible to climb right to reach the Mountain Trail (below), or left to explore the unnamed north-east corrie of Beinn Eighe.

## 11. Mountain Trail

*Start: Glas Leitir loch-side car park NH 001 650: see map on page 6*

*Grade **B 5**, Length 5.5 km, Up 560m*

*An easier and a much harder trail, both best taken clockwise*

From the popular loch-side car park take the path under the road-bridge. A path right over a footbridge takes you on the relatively easy **Nature Trail (A 2)**.

The path straight ahead is the much more difficult and remarkable **Mountain Trail**. This is a serious undertaking, climbing high into a mountain environment. Suitable clothing and footwear are needed, along with fitness and footsureness. Much of the walking is on quartzite, a rock which may be shattered or slippery. The path was well made in 1970 and is mostly good, but in places it is decaying and needs to be followed with care. Climb slowly, up through pinewoods (beware slippery roots underfoot) to the treeline, and then on into the white quartzite (and 'pipe rock' with its fossil wormcasts), reaching the summit at 550 m. After a short descent you pass several lochans, with the hill Meall a' Ghiubhais ahead. The path finally descends steeply and strenuously, needing care in places, following an ingenious route back down to the pine woods and Loch Maree. When you meet the Nature Trail it is shorter to turn right.

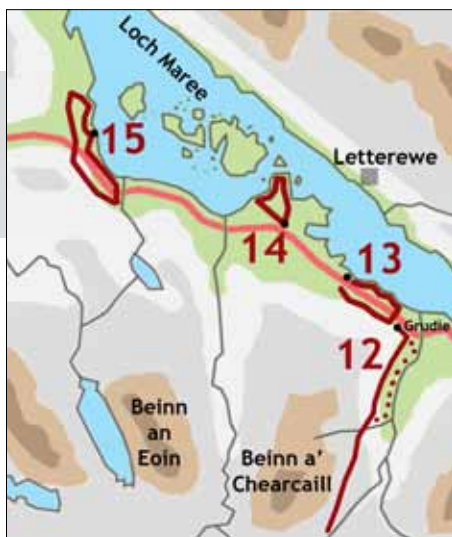
# LOCH MAREE

## 12. Glen Grudie

*Start: a short stretch of the Old Road just west of Grudie NG 9622 6801*

*Grade **A 3**, Length 5 km x2, Up 280 m*

*A path into remote mountainous country*



From the parking area walk 100m east along the road and turn right to pass a house. The narrow but well-made path starts to the left of the house and follows the foot of Beinn a' Chearcaill. It is one of several in the area restored by the Footpath Trust, a combination of the local estates and Highland Council in the 1990s. It climbs gently to reach Coire Briste's outflow burn (which in spate can be hard to cross), and an area of boulders and moraines. The path continues below steep slopes until it finally stops at a remote spot beside the Allt Coire Mhic Fhearchair, the burn which flows from that corrie (see Walk 5). Return the same way.

A more difficult **alternative return** (Grade **E**) follows the north side of the Coire Briste burn over rough ground, with rock slabs in places, down to the hydro-electric scheme below, where there is a gate in the fence. Follow the track back to the road, passing the power house and deciding what you think of this development.



*In Glen Grudie, Slioch beyond*

## 13. Loch Maree Shore

*Start: large car park at NG 951 689*

*Grade **D 2**, Length 5 km, Up 40 m*

*Pathless loch shore ramble, returning along the old road*



*Slioch across the loch*

This walk is best done on a fine day when the loch level is low. From the right end of the popular signed car park descend to the shore and a small beach. Then simply follow the shore slowly, on rock slabs or moorland, enjoying the rock, the waterside plants, the pine trees, several beaches, and of course the views across the loch, especially of Slioch. When you reach some boats, turn right on a track and go up to the road. Cross and continue ahead, or go left to find an easier route, to reach the old road (a diversion to the old road bridge in the trees is worthwhile). Turn right and follow it. The original single track road here was opened in 1849. You may see traces of an even older road above: the military route to Poolewe laid out in 1763 but never completed. When you are near the car park, cut across to the main road.



## 14. Loch Maree Islands

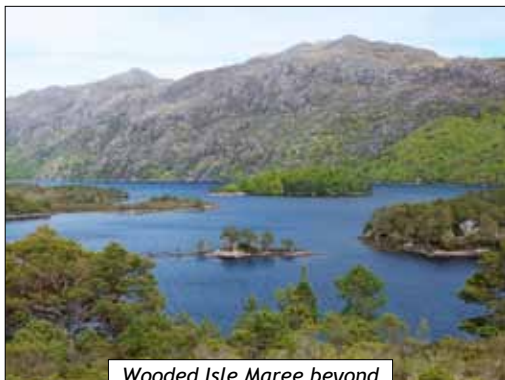
*Start: a hidden untarred car park at NG 934 702: see map below*

*Grade **E 3**, Length 4 km, Up 50 m*

*Pathless moorland walk to the loch with views of the islands: map useful*

The gravel car park (left by the road-builders) is hard to spot, up a short track on the north side of the road between two bends.

This walk involves walking across moorland and finding your own route. The reward is close-up views of some of the Loch Maree Islands. Head north-west across peaty moorland until the loch shore is below. Follow the shore, staying high, to reach a wooded area on a small hilltop. Historic Isle Maree can be seen between the biggest island,



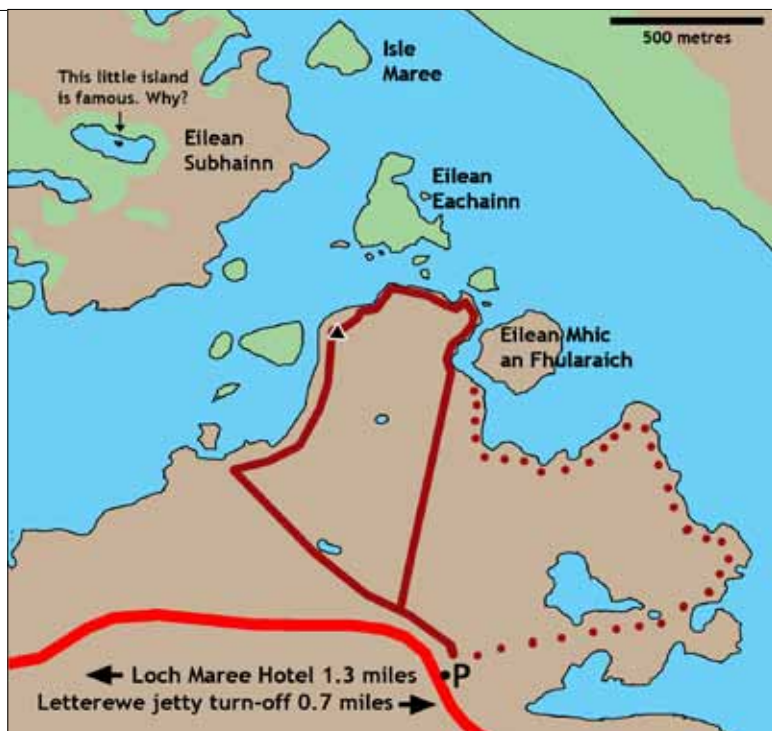
Wooded Isle Maree beyond

Eilean Subhainn, and pine-wooded Eilean Eachainn. Next it is best to scramble down rough overgrown ground to the shore itself. Follow it to Eilean Mhic an Fhularaich (which may not be an island if the water is low). Then head back across the moorland to see if you can find the car park (a straight line is unlikely to be possible). Or if you prefer, continue round the shore.

There are at least 30 islands on Loch Maree. They are now part of Beinn Eighe NNR.

Isle Maree was a pagan sacred place before St Maelrubha (642-722) set up a hermitage there. It was later associated with Vikings and with pagan cures for lunacy.

Loch Maree was originally called Loch Ewe (the Inner one), but was renamed after the saint in the 1700s.



## 15. Slattadale Paths

*Start: Slattadale car park on Loch Maree NG 888 721*

*Grade **B 2**, Length 7 km, Up 140 m*

*Network of forestry paths and tracks: sheltered from prevailing winds*

Unusually for Wester Ross, these walks are through forestry land, often on broad tracks. But much of the forestry has been felled recently, so the views across Loch Maree are better than expected. A circuit is here described, starting from the Loch Maree car park, with alternatives. (The Victoria Falls car park is well signed, and the short circular path up the river here is worth doing alone if you are short of time.)

The small road down to the popular Loch Maree car park is poorly signed, and short of passing places. From the car park follow the footpath north to the small Slattadale River. There is a ford here, but the footbridge upstream is easier. Over the bridge, turn right and follow the path along the shore (this path leads eventually to Tollie, near Poolewe, following the line of the old unfinished military road of 1763: Walk 36). The path needs repair and may be very wet in places. On the right there is a conspicuous gneiss knoll which can be reached with some difficulty. Reach a fence and a burn, and bear left up the hill on a new path. This reaches a major forestry track which gives views of the islands and the loch. (At a bend before you descend to Slattadale River again, there is a short-cut path back to the car park.) The track continues to the main road. Cross over and just up the hill you come to a stretch of the old road. Follow this left where it becomes a forestry track (BUT see the warning, right, about possible closure). This track reaches a junction (you can turn right for a long climb up to Loch Garbhaig, part of a hydro scheme). Visit the Falls, named after Queen Victoria when she visited the Loch Maree Hotel, and walk the short circular path up-river. Then return to your start along the easy road verge.



# RED STABLE

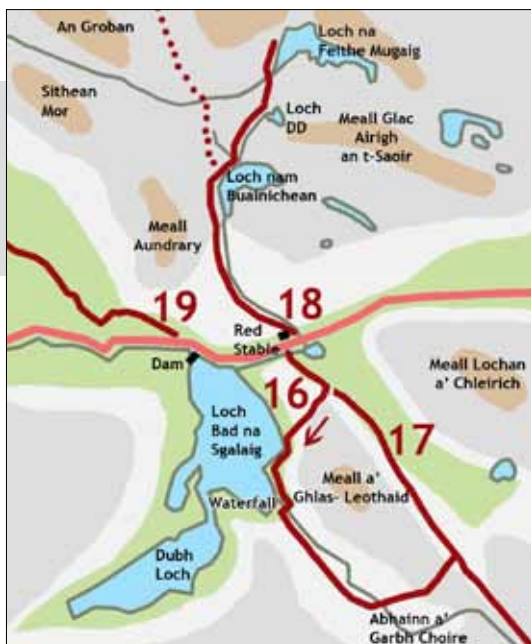
## 16. Waterfall Circuit

*Start: 'Red Stable' car park  
NG 856 720*

*Grade **C 3**, Length 7 km, Up 160 m  
Rough path and track on a circuit  
of Meall a' Ghlas-Leothaid*

The shed called locally the Red Stable is now green, but keeps its name. Cross the road and a bridge to the start of an old track. Follow the track through a gate and on to just before the first steep climb: on the right a wooden bridge shows the start of a very poor trodden path across boggy ground (wellies useful if it's wet). Reach a fence at Loch Bad na Sgalaig and follow it to the waterfall in the Abhainn a' Gharbh Choire, best when in spate. Upstream cross a footbridge.

The path is narrow but better now, along the steep side of a narrow glen. It emerges onto flat moorland (the bridge here does not need to be crossed!), where you follow a trodden path indicated by posts. The river meanders across the moor, and the path leaves it to climb a slope. Cross the bridge above this, and keep on across boggy ground. Finally the trodden path becomes a made track. At the junction with another track, turn left. There are a few interpretation signs along this track, which takes you back to the start.



*Another waterfall in the glen*

## 17. Loch na h-Oidhche

*Start: 'Red Stable' car park NG 856 720  
Grade **B 4**, Length 7 km x2, Up 320 m  
Track up to a remote loch*

The track used to start and finish Walk 16 continues all the way to the 'loch of the night', between Beinn an Eoin and Baosbheinn. Return the same way. The only hazard is a river crossing on stepping stones which may be impossible in spate: just upstream you can see that this river is an artificial diversion from the main river, probably made to reduce flooding downstream (or perhaps, it is said, to make the Victoria Falls bigger for the Queen's visit! – page 11). Return the same way,

**Extension.** The track, now rougher, continues another 3 km to the remote private bothy, Poca Buidhe, at the head of the loch, nearly in the heart of the Torridon Hills.



*Boathouse, with Baosbheinn beyond*



## 18. North of the Stable

*Start: 'Red Stable' car park NG 856 720*

*Grade E 4, Length 3 km x2, Up 190m*

*Rough walking into remote country to visit three lochs: map advised*



*Loch na Feithe Mugaig*

North of the Red (green) Stable a lonely area of lochs and small very rocky hills stretches north to Loch Maree and west to Gairloch. This walk gives an introduction to it, and is mostly off-path: boots needed. Start on a path east of the car park. When it ends, continue on an intermittent ATV route, often wet. When that fades, follow marker posts to Loch nam Buainichean and on to a small inlet: avoid this, crossing a water channel; then leave the posts and follow the loch shore on animal/angler paths to a place where two small burns enter the loch close together. Turn left and briefly cross very rough ground to reach the steep slope between the two burns, and zigzag up this as far as the first tree. Traverse right to the second burn and follow it up to a smaller loch, Loch Dubh Dughaill. Go north from this over a slight col to reach an arm of Loch na Feithe Mugaig. Follow the left shore as far as you like, and climb uphill for a better view of this loch and the 'cnoc and lochan' (small hills and lochs) scenery typical of the Lewisian Gneiss. Return the same way, or any other way which you fancy if you are good at navigation and like rough ground. (The circuit of Loch na FM is challenging, with cliffs to be avoided.)

**Alternative (E 4).** If you continue to follow the posts from Loch Buainichean, they take you along a rough route to Flowerdale and Gairloch. Rather than the long circuit of Loch Airigh a' Phuill, a short-cut left of it is better, passing the north end of the hill An Groban to find more posts which lead you down and over a stile to upper Flowerdale (page 18 map).

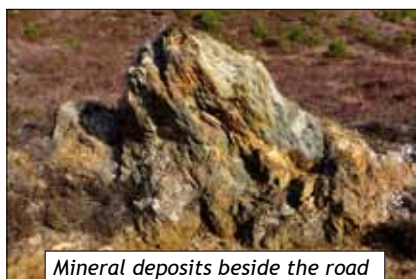
## 19. Old Road to Flowerdale

*Start: roadside parking at Loch Bad na Sgalaig dam NG 847 720, finish at Flowerdale*

*Grade B 2, Length 5 km, Up 30 m*

*Part of the original route from Loch Maree to Gairloch: see page 18 Flowerdale map*

This walk needs transport at both ends (or use the bus). Across the road from the Loch Bad na Sgalaig hydro-electric scheme dam is the old road of 1813. The track is easy to follow all the way. First it passes through a former plantation where it can be muddy. There are several interesting geological sites near the path, and in places you can see traces of an even older road, possibly built about 1760 when the Mackenzies acquired Conan House in the east (the family travelled by horse and boat from east to west each spring). You pass above Kerrysdale and its farmhouse. Beyond this you join a wide forestry/hydro track, but quickly leave it by taking a path to the left which goes along a straight narrow wooded glen. You finally emerge in Flowerdale where a path joins from the right. Soon either keep straight on to reach the Old Inn and the car park; or bear right downhill aiming straight at Flowerdale House, across a bridge and up a tree-lined avenue, and then keep left to reach the car park.



*Mineral deposits beside the road*

# SOUTH OF GAIRLOCH

## 20. Coille Airigh na Cloiche

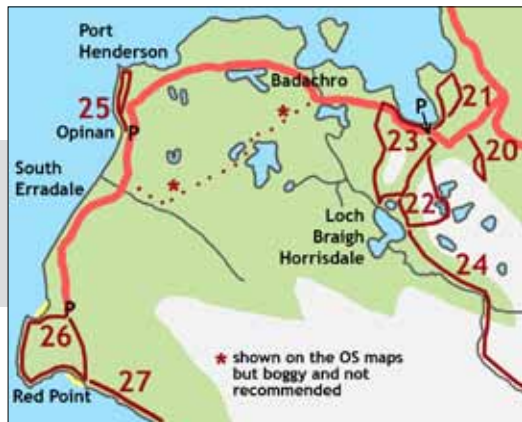
*Start: roadside parking at cattle grid  
NG 815 725*

*Grade **D 2**, Length 4.5 km, Up 50 m*

*Exploration of a birch wood*

This walk needs very dry conditions, preferably before the bracken grows. Take the Badachro road B8056 and park at the first cattle grid. 200m beyond

the cattle grid follow a track left across to the wood. The area was a rather grand shieling ('airigh', summer pasture) for Flowerdale's cattle in the early 1800s. Go through the gate in the high fence (if it's wet, there may be a sea of mud here made by cattle). You can explore the wood at random, or try to follow this route. Take the poor track left from the gate, or you may prefer to walk in the trees above it. The track improves at a fork (keep straight on) and soon it stops at an unexpected ravine. It's hard to explain the track and ravine, but they probably relate to limestone quarrying here. Scramble along the ravine with its moss-covered boulders, or above it. After it, cross an ancient wall and keep going, avoiding wet ground to its right. Up to your right there is a ridge, and at its end there is a faint grassy track. Follow this as it curves round and up onto the ridge, and then back along its right side. There are some very old birch trees, worth examining. Pass an old walled enclosure. Soon after that, turn right and descend to an open area where there are holes which may also be the result of quarrying, and the ruins of a small house. Continue left past the house and finally turn right to reach the fence and the gate.



*The mysterious ravine*

## 21. Coille Dhubh

*Start: car park west of Shildaig Lodge Hotel NG 805 725*

*Grade **E 3**, Length 3 km, Up 120 m*

*Rough woodland circuit, full of interest: needs self-reliance and careful route-finding*

This walk is short in distance but the roughest in the book: you need to be keen on jungle exploration, good at navigation, and able to climb a gate! The 'black wood' is an SSSI because of its oak and birch trees; it also has heather, bog, molinia tussocks, mosses – and bracken, so it is best in spring or winter. There are animal paths here and there, but much of the walking is on rough ground where you make your own route, often hindered by tree branches. Look out for ruins from the time when this was farmland – from prehistoric times until the trees grew or were planted (about 1840). Wellies recommended when wet.

**(1) To the col.** Cross the road, go through the 'Private Property' gate and be sure to close it, and walk across in front of the hotel (unobtrusively) to a grass path along the shore. This



leads past an old lime kiln to a high fence: climb the gate (moving aside and replacing the wooden slats). Follow the track a short way, then bear left between two oaks (and a swing) on an almost-path through birchwood. Soon you descend to a burn. Follow it upstream about 50 metres to a double-oak, cross, and climb straight uphill. Don't go to the top, but skirt the hill round and up to its left, to reach a broad flat birch-covered col between this hill and the next (perhaps visit the heathery hilltop just above for the view).

**(2) Col to beach.** Cross the flat col to the foot of the next hill, turn right, go over a slight rise, down to a triple-birch, and on down a small shallow grassy valley. Soon a small burn starts. Follow it, often on animal paths, until the seashore is about 100 metres ahead. Then turn right through birch jungle, descend to cross bracken, go through more birch, and arrive at the steep slope above

the shore. Follow its edge, until you descend to a pebble beach and a burn. (There may be many birds here, thanks to the outflow from a fish hatchery across the River Kerry.)

**(3) Return.** Follow the burn up as far as a waterfall to the left. Then continue through the birches up a small valley. At its head an overgrown path starts, leading to an old quad bike track. There are views of the loch. After a small lochan the track fades: just keep going in the same direction, and you will find traces of an old made track. Follow this down to the gate.

## 22. Fairy Lochs

*Start: car park west of Shieldaig Lodge Hotel NG 805 725*

*Grade **C 2**, Length 5.5 km, Up 190 m*

*A rough path to the site of a Second World War plane crash, with several lochs: wellies useful when wet*

From the car park walk past Shieldaig Lodge Hotel to a concrete bridge on the right. Cross it and follow the track about 200m, keeping straight ahead. A sign points left to the Fairy Lochs. Follow the path uphill. Soon after it leaves the trees you pass some bare rock on the left. Beyond this there is more bare rock: turn uphill here (easy to miss), ignoring the level path ahead, and enter the trees again briefly. The path is now clear all the way, but it is very poor, alternating between wet and muddy, and rough and rocky. A sign guides you to the right, the path climbs to a gate through a deer fence, and you reach the first of the 'Fairy Lochs'. After this loch the path descends to another. Here on the rock there is a memorial to the American servicemen who died when their B-24H Liberator bomber crashed here in 1945. Wreckage is scattered around the area. It is thought that the aircraft was diving in cloud to put out an engine fire, and pulled up too violently when a mountain appeared, causing damage and loss of control. (Learn more at Gairloch Museum.) The site is a war grave: please respect it and leave it as you found it. Next take a path round the left side of the loch, mostly well-trodden and marked with some cairns and sticks, but it sometimes splits. Find the best route across several wet areas, go through a deer fence gate, and finally reach the track beside Loch Braigh Horrisdale. Turn right and follow the track back to the start, with some good Lewisian Gneiss scenery.



## 23. Horrisdale Hydro Scheme

*Start: car park west of Shieldaig Lodge Hotel  
NG 805 725*

*Grade **A/D 2**, Length 6 km, Up 140 m*

*Varied circuit making use of a hydro track,  
with one cross-country section*



From the car park turn left and walk the road (narrow: care needed) along the coast and then uphill until you reach an obvious track to the left. Follow this up through varied scenery with crags of 3 billion-year-old Lewisian Gneiss, to the hydro-electric power house on Badachro River. The track then climbs steeply. Go through a gate to the water intake at Loch Braigh Horrisdale (what do you think of this recently-built scheme?). Return through the gate, and turn right to climb the slope. Continue across moorland for 500 metres, above the fence and Lochan Fuar, to reach an old track. Turn left and follow the track all the way to the road. Turn left to return to the car park.

## 24. Loch na Gaineamheach

*Start: car park west of Shieldaig Lodge Hotel  
NG 805 725*

*Grade **B 4**, Length 7 km x2, Up 260 m*

*Visit a remote loch and waterfalls*



The Horrisdale track (also used for Walks 22 and 23) continues a long way into remote country on the western edge of the Torridon Hills, on a track and paths of varying quality. From the car park walk back along the road to a concrete bridge on the right. Cross it and follow the track 2 km up to the large Loch Braigh Horrisdale, now affected by a hydro scheme (*see Walk 23 above*). Continue for another 2 km to a footbridge across a river which joins Horrisdale River. Soon you pass two waterfalls. After these the path leaves the river, and re-joins it before you reach its source, Loch Gaineamhach, the 'sandy loch'. The mountain Baosbheinn looms to the east. Return the same way. (A hydro-electric scheme is planned here, but may not materialise...)

**Extension (E 5).** As the signpost at the roadside said, this route continues to Torridon (13 miles / 21 km total). The path passes Loch a' Ghobhainn and stops at Loch a' Bhealaich. Then you have to make your own way to the pass between Beinn Alligin and Beinn Dearg, and through this to pick up the path down to the Alligin car park. Transport may be a problem!

## 25. Sron na Carra (Carr Point)

*Start: beach access parking on grass at Opinan NG 745 725*

*Grade **C 1**, Length 3 km, Up 40 m*

*A beach and a stroll along an accessible stretch of rocky coast*

From the beach parking area in the village of Opinan (the southern Opinan, not the one in Walk 44), follow a path to the beach. Then turn right and follow the coast north on small paths, with views across to Skye and the Outer Hebrides, and billion-year-old Torridonian Sandstone forming the shore. After 1 km a marker indicates that there is a

cave below, the 'cave of gold': but this is difficult to reach, slippery, and only possible at low tide. Continue to the point, Sron na Carra. You can return the same way, but for a change walk further inland and higher up, following sheep tracks across peaty ground. The small hill which you pass first was the site of a 'dun' (fort) belonging to the MacLeods in the 1400s. The mysterious posts before the beach were used to train coastguards in using a 'breeches buoy'.

## 26. Red Point

*Start: car park at end of road B8056*

*NG 732 687*

*Grade **D 2**, Length 6 km, Up 40 m*

*Circuit with two beaches and rocky coast: best in dry conditions and low tide*

Red Point is a peninsula with a beach on each side of it. From the car park follow the farm track through Redpoint Farm and beyond it where there may be cattle and sheep (keep dogs under control): this area may be very muddy when wet, needing wellies. Cross an area of grassy dunes behind the southern beach. Reach the beach at its far end where there are remains of a salmon fishing station which closed in 2000. Then follow the beach north, perhaps visiting the island Eilean Tioram ('dry island') if the tide allows. (This beach featured in the film 'What we did on our holiday'.) At the west end of the beach, climb to the higher ground above rather than following the marshy shore, but there may still be wet ground to cross. Reach the rocky coast and follow grassy ground above it with sheep paths. Reach the headland before the northern beach. At the beach cross a burn and follow it to join a path through the dunes back to the car park.



*The southern beach*

## 27. Craig

*Start: car park at end of road B8056*

*NG 732 687*

*Grade **B 3**, Length 8 km x2, Up 80 m*

*Coastal walk to an abandoned village*

The walking distance from Red Point to Diabaig on Loch Torridon is 13 km; the distance by road is about 70 km. In the 1970s there was a plan to build a coastal road, but it was shelved. This walk takes you as far as Craig. Evidence of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers has been found in this area.



*Craig bothy*

From the Red Point car park follow the farm track through Redpoint Farm and on to the grassy dunes behind the southern beach. From the end of this beach, the path of variable quality follows the coast all the way to Craig River, with views across to Applecross, the island of Rona, and Skye. At Craig turn inland through trees and boulders and cross a bridge to the abandoned village. The surviving house became a Youth Hostel until 2003, and is now an open bothy. Return the same way.

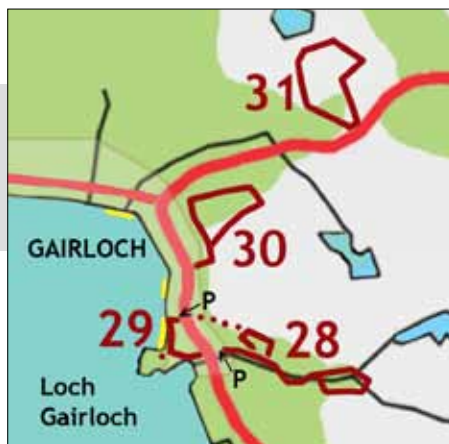
**Extension.** The path, clearer now, continues 5 km to Diabaig. If you can persuade someone to drive to the end of the road there, this is easier than returning to Red Point.

# GAIRLOCH

## 28. Flowerdale

*Start: car parks either side of A832 at Harbour road junction NG 809 751  
a. Grade B 2, Length 4.5 km, Up 80 m  
Two walks on a path system: map below*

Flowerdale has been the seat of the Mackenzies, lairds of the large Gairloch Estate, since about 1500. The present house was built in 1738 and enlarged in 1904. Popular paths take you around the glen and through the woodland.



**a. The Waterfall Walk.** From the former road bridge, damaged in a flood in 1981 and converted into a footbridge, follow the path with the river on your right and the Old Inn opposite. Signs indicate the route of the Waterfall path. Pass two former fishing ponds, and an ice-house above the drive. Opposite Flowerdale House turn right down an avenue of large trees marking the end of the old road from Loch Maree (1813: see Walk 19). A short way down this you turn left: cross a burn, then the river. At a junction, turn left and cross the river again. Reach the hydro-electric power house. Turn right on a wide track and follow this, ignoring another track to the right, until it turns steeply uphill. Take the path along the river and cross a bridge (slippery when wet). The path climbs with occasional limited views of the waterfall. The path is now steep, narrow and worn as it follows the river above the waterfall and into open ground. Cross a footbridge on the right, and follow the return path through wind-damaged



*The upper glen with rocky An Groban*

woodland down until you meet a broad track, passing a memorial to a local piper. Turn right, cross the concrete bridge and turn left, and you are back on the main path. Turn left at the power house. After the path crosses the river, take the left-hand path ('Cherrytree Hill') to return to your start. On your right is the small wooded Cherrytree Hill: a small unsigned trodden path leads over this, worth taking unless the bracken is high. The main path continues to the Old Inn and the car park via a DIY/builders' yard.

**b. The Arboretum.** The Gairloch lairds liked to plant trees, and the wooded 54-metre hill between the house and the road shows some of the results. (This walk can also be done as a diversion from the Waterfall Walk.) From the car park follow the main path along the river, past two former fishing ponds, and take the first path signposted left to the Arboretum. This climbs to a high point which almost has a view west, then descends past a former pond to emerge across a footbridge at the head of a flat valley. (On the other side of this valley, paths lead left to the Golf Club car park, an alternative approach to Flowerdale.) Follow the burn uphill and turn right over a footbridge. The path now takes you towards Flowerdale House, where you bear right and reach the main path. Turn right to return to the car park.

## 29. Beach and Harbour

*Start: beach/Golf Club car park  
NG 807 756*

*Grade A 2, Length 2.5 km, Up 30 m  
Varied circuit on paths and roads*

From the large car park which serves the beach, the Golf Club and the Church of Scotland, take the boardwalk down to the beach. Either walk south along the beach, or take the path to the left between golf course and dunes. At the end of the beach the rocky peninsula was used as a dun (fort) in the 1400s, and perhaps before



that in the Iron Age. The dun has a grassy entrance area, separated by a shallow ditch from the main area which had a wall round it (with some vitrification); a third area beyond is cut off by a ravine, but might have had a bridge to it. Return to the path which leads along a boardwalk through trees and up to several viewpoints. Continue winding through woodland to another viewpoint overlooking the harbour. Go down to the road, and turn right to explore the harbour area. Return along the road and on past the Sitooterie, an award-winning community garden. Reach the main road and turn left to return to your start. Note a large hollow in the golf course opposite the church: this is called Leabaidh na Ba Baine, bed of the white cow; it is said to have been made by the giant Fingal for his cow to give birth in, and more recently was used as an outdoor church for up to 3000 people. Next to the car park the Old Cemetery is worth visiting.

**Alternative return.** Extend the walk into Flowerdale (see map opposite): for example, follow the path up the river and use either of the two signposted Arboretum paths (the first path goes over a hill, the second path is easier), and return directly to the Golf Club car park by a path along the flat valley and past the new cemetery.

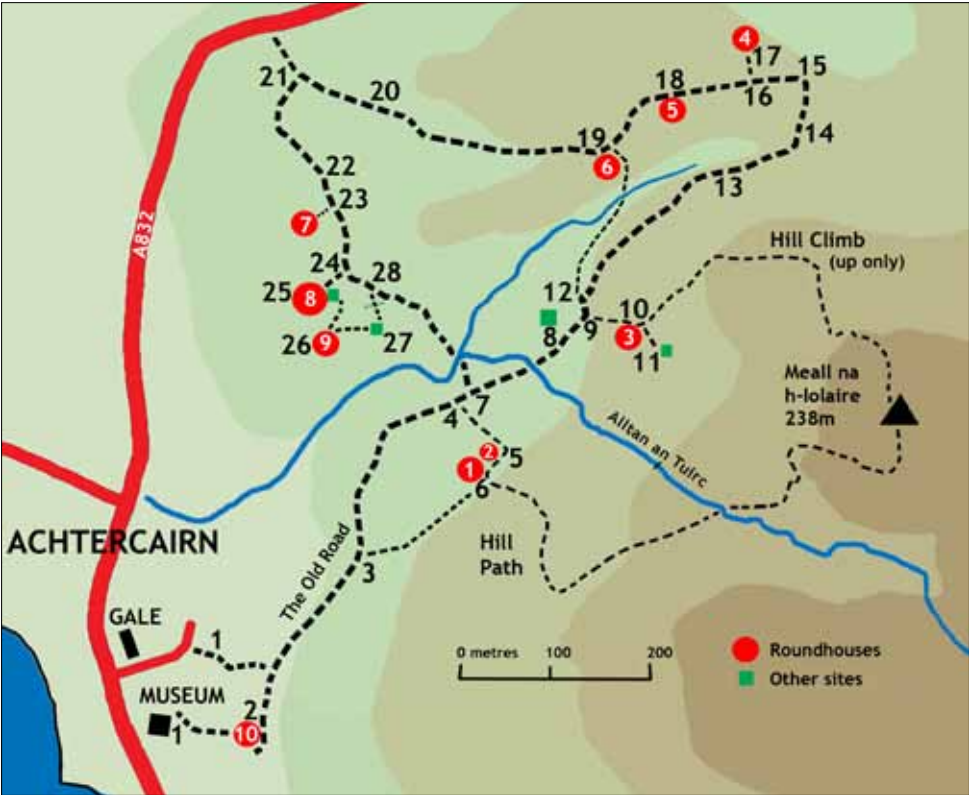


### 30. Achtercairn Archaeology Trail

*Start: village car parks at Gairloch Museum, GALE Centre (TIC), McColls store, etc.  
Grade **B 2**, Length 4 km, Up 100 m  
An archaeology trail combined with a scenic walk*

To make the most of this walk, buy the annotated map or guidebook at the Museum or GALE: these explain what there is at each point 1-28, and give details of the archaeological sites. However, the walk can be enjoyed simply as a walk!

Achtercairn is the central part of Gairloch, where most services are found. The area above Achtercairn has been farmed since the Neolithic period, and several digs have produced dates from 2700BC to 250BC. Later it was used for shielings (summer pasture), and in 1800 it became part of Achtercairn Farm. Now it is within a huge tree-planting scheme. The walk has two starting points (see the map), of which the Museum path is easier. Much of the path follows the line of the first



road to be built between Gairloch and Poolewe (about 1830). The paths vary in quality: in wet weather mud and puddles form in many places. The area is underlain by the 2 billion-year-old rock Amphibolite (metamorphosed Basalt). It produces a good crop of wildflowers in season.

**Extension.** As well as the standard circuit you can climb Meall na h-Iolair (‘hill of the eagle’, 238m): up the tricky ‘Hill Climb’ with some rock steps (up only, please), or up and down the easier but eroded ‘Hill Path’. The hill is a fine viewpoint in clear conditions.

## 31. Gneiss and Sandstone

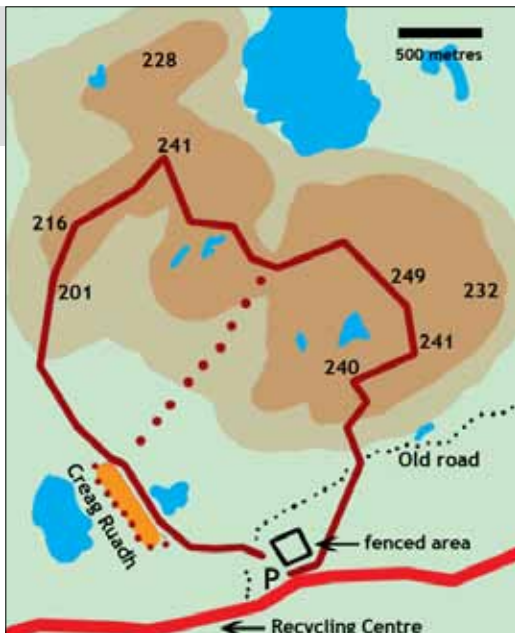
*Start: small parking area 957568*

*Grade **E 3**, Length 4.5 km, Up 220 m*

*Exploring a pathless rocky area*

This walk is different: a chance to explore a pathless nameless area of small rocky hills and ridges, mostly made of 3 billion-year-old Lewisian Gneiss. You make your own route and take your time. The plan shows an approximate possible long circuit, but this will not be found helpful on the complicated ground! — nor will the OS map. The terrain is complex, but mostly not too rough because sheep graze it.

The car park is beside the Gairloch-Poolewe road where the woodland ends, just after the Recycling Centre, near an old fenced enclosure which is a former rubbish dump. Walk a short way along the road, cross a bridge left, pass the corner of the fence, then keep going north east to reach the old 1830 road from Gairloch to Poolewe. Head into the hills above this and wander at will. You might try to bag some of the small summits, or to find the scattered lochans. Spend time examining the varied gneiss, which is rough and good to walk on. Once you have had enough of the gneiss, head across moorland to the strange Creag Ruadh, a sandstone escarpment between two lochs. Walk either along the top of this, or below it on complex ground for a better view. The most prominent cliff is at the north end, used by rock climbers who call it Aztec Tower. Study the rock, the bottom layer of the billion-year-old Torridon Group of sandstones, with layers of ‘breccia’ which contain broken pieces of older local rock. From the south end of the sandstone crags, head round the hillside and back to the car park with a rough finish (you may notice several prehistoric roundhouse ruins on the way).



# NORTH OF GAIRLOCH

## 32. Sand Archaeology Trail

*Start: parking in small signed quarry NG 762 801*

*Grade **C 2**, Length 3 km, Up 40 m*

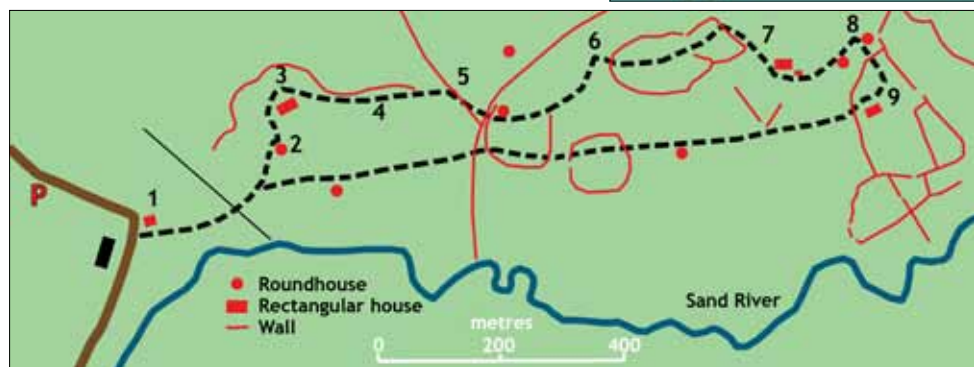
*Buildings and fields from various periods*

There are plans to develop this trail with improved paths, bracken clearance and a new guidebook (the original one may be available at Gairloch Museum).

Walk from the parking quarry back to the road bend. Points (*map below*) are marked with upright stones.

- 1 This old barn, c1876, belonged to the schoolmaster (house and school opposite).
- 2 Prehistoric roundhouse; later structures, perhaps lambing pens, on the south west and inside.
- 3 Rectangular building, perhaps on the site of an earlier roundhouse; adapted as a small sheep pen.
- 4 Remains of a stone wall, probably prehistoric like most of the stone walls here.
- 5 Two walls which you cross are made of turf. East of them is a roundhouse, with another in heather to the north. Keep the rock outcrop to your left.
- 6 Here you enter and cross a hill-field, with various farming remains; iron slag has been found here, suggesting previous iron-working.
- 7 A substantial rectangular building. It probably belonged to a tacksman (an important tenant who sub-lets) in the 17th or 18th century. It was later converted into a shieling.
- 8 Two more roundhouses, the eastern one clearer.
- 9 A rectangular stone house, with an added shed.

You are advised to keep high on the return walk: the land by the river is often wet.



### 33. North Erradale Coast

*Start: the Sand Archaeology Trail car parking quarry NG 762 801*

*Grade **D 4**, Length 9 km, Up 160 m*

*Rocky coast, townships, moorland and low hill; two fence-crossings: map useful*

There is a good stretch of Torridonian Sandstone coast between the townships of Big Sand and North Erradale, but it is awkward to reach. This route avoids difficulties with parking, private land and most fences, but involves a 2.5 km road walk (avoidable with a second car). From the car park walk on along the road to North Erradale. Ignore the signed turning and continue to a brown hut (telephone exchange, with parking space). Just after this cross the burn Allt na Glac Luachraich, here in a straight ditch: turn left and follow it. Soon after the power line, cross the burn and bear slightly left across moorland to a fence. Follow this down to a fence junction: cross the wooden fence, then step over the other fence above. Head for the sea and go steeply down to the pebble beach, the best in the area. Beyond the beach climb steeply up, and from now on follow the edge as closely as possible. **Important: if there are sheep and you have a dog, use a lead: there are cliffs below.** One more fence: you should be able to squeeze through it beside the big post (if not, it's a lengthy diversion to a small gate). Continue round the coast until the rock stops, opposite the east end of the island of Longa, above a bay which once held a salmon fishing station. The township of Big Sand starts here. To return to the start, climb straight uphill on moorland, with a growing view. The low hill ahead has two tops; avoid the first to its right, and find between the tops a sheep enclosure with a track and power line leading past it. Climb the higher top beyond (129m), then bear right and walk downhill due east 1.2 km to the car park.

The B8021 road from Gairloch passes a series of townships (crofting communities, typically with houses widely scattered) as it heads west and then north, ending at Melvaig. Here the exposed coast faces east to the Outer Hebrides.

Beyond Melvaig a narrow and in places steep little road leads another 5 km to Rubha Reidh lighthouse. It is a private road, but driving is permitted on it, with limits of 20mph, 2.1m width, 7½ tons; however, **note** that insurance and recovery may not cover you here.

**Parking is very limited.** There is space for a few cars in Melvaig at the public road end, and before the final hill down to the lighthouse there is a more spacious quarry; please don't use passing places for parking. Bicycles may be better than a car.

### 34. Coast North of Melvaig

*Start: Melvaig NG 740 870*

*Grade **D 2-3**, Length maximum 5 km x2, Up 150+ m*

*Exploration of a rocky coastline: steep ground*

The rocky coastline below the road gives adventurous walking from Melvaig to the lighthouse, with steep ground and uphill stretches to avoid cliffs and other difficulties: **care needed**. From the public road end at Melvaig walk along the private road, steeply up at first. After about 100 metres, leave the road and head downhill. Follow the complex coast north.

The sea is mostly inaccessible, and the main interest is in the sandstone formations. Also keep an eye open for birds and cetaceans (porpoises, dolphins, whales). You will reach one place where access to the shore is possible; here there are rock arches and a peninsula. When you have had enough, climb to the road and follow it back.





## 35. Lighthouse and Coast

*Start: Quarry south of Rubha Reidh lighthouse  
NG 740 913*

*Grade **C 2**, Length 3 km x2, Up 160 m  
Coastal rock scenery and sea stacks, and an  
optional difficult beach*



Camas Mor

From the parking quarry, walk downhill to Rubha Reidh lighthouse. The keeper's house is now a private guesthouse: please respect the privacy of owners and guests. The lighthouse was built in 1912 by David Stevenson, and is 25m high. In Gairloch Museum you can see the original lens, and there is a display on the story of the lighthouse. Rubha Reidh (pronounced *rooa ray*) means 'smooth cape'.

From the road near its bottom a track leads right to the jetty which was used to supply the lighthouse before the road was built. Above to the left of the track there is a large area of 'smooth' sandstone slabs (Torridonian Stoer Group, 1200 million years old). Then follow small paths made by sheep and humans, round the jetty inlet and keeping as close to the steep coast as possible with views of rocky inlets and sea stacks, and finally of the sandy bay Camas Mor ('big bay'). Return to the lighthouse, or directly to the car park across moorland further inland if you prefer. Or...

Whether you go further depends partly on your confidence on steep ground. The slopes above Camas Mor are not straightforward: **care needed**. To visit the beach look for small steep paths down the slopes towards the further end.

**Extension (E 5, Length total 11.5 km, Up 400 m).** If you are confident about walking and route-finding across rough (sometimes very rough and steep) ground, a rewarding long circuit is possible. A map is useful. From the east end of Camas Mor, follow a path south east.

You pass a small bothy, and later a ruined village: Lochdraing, lived in until the 1880s (*a track, wet in places, leads from here north east to the coast, and can be used to reach Cove at the end of the Loch Ewe road: see Walk 38*). Continue on the path to the south end of Loch an Draing where you enter woodland: birch, hazel and tall



planted larches (*the path continues all the way to the Inverasdale, but is not recommended*). When the path approaches the south edge of the wood, turn right and head west and gradually uphill, exploring the wood. Reach the steep escarpment above, and find a way to climb it. Above it is a large area of peaty moorland. Bear right and after 1.5 km reach the prominent radio masts on Maol Breac. From here walk down the road to the junction, and turn right.

# POOLEWE

## 36. Tollie-Slattadale Path

*Start: Small car park beside road at NG 858 789, finish at Loch Maree car park*  
*Grade B 3, Length 9 km, Up 200 m*  
*An old path over a pass, rough descent*

This walk needs transport at both ends, unless you *either* return from the highest point, *or* use the alternative below. The car park is easily missed, or may be full; there is more parking down the road. A path leads down to a bridge over Tollie Burn and through a gate. The path which you now follow is on the line of a military road planned in 1763 by a successor of General Wade, but never completed. At first the path has the well-cliffed Creag Mhor Thollaidh (Tollie Rock) on the left and a complex rocky area on the right, both Lewisian Gneiss. In 3 km it climbs to its summit at 243m.

**Warning:** from now on the path deteriorates and becomes a typical highland ex-path: rough, eroded down to stones or bare rock or water. It is walkable, but tough on the feet and not for the faint-hearted! If you continue, eventually you will reach a gate into a former forestry plantation: Slattadale Forest – see the map on page 11. To avoid a very wet loch-side path to the left (unless it has been repaired) you can turn right uphill, and join a broad track; at a bend just before you descend to the bridge over Slattadale River, take a path left down the river and over a footbridge to the car park beside Loch Maree.

**Alternative (E).** If you like exploratory rough off-path walking (or geology), you can make a circuit; a map may help. Take the path as far as the first lochan, then turn right and head cross-country, preferring to walk on rock. Try to find a V-shaped lochan after about 600m. From there head north, and aim to descend to the path near the north end of Tollie Rock. This walk takes you through a major geological feature, the Tollie Antiform (a huge arch-shaped fold), with a lot of bare rock and a bewildering series of ridges and cliffs.



## 37. Cliff Hill

*Start: Small car park beside road at NG 858 789; or other roadside parking*  
*Grade D 2, Length 3.5 km, Up 190 m*  
*The rocky hill behind Poolewe, with radio masts and a view*

From the car park, simply cross the road and head straight uphill. This walk takes you up the 229m Cliff Hill which is made of Lewisian Gneiss (like Walk 31 but easier). The small separate Croft Hill is off to the right and worth visiting on the way, with a view down to Poolewe. The summit of Cliff Hill is just past a cluster of radio masts. An easier descent is to take the track down from these masts to the road, passing water supply tanks (water from Loch Maree is pumped to Gairloch: a plentiful supply!).

**Extension (E 3).** This needs transport at Poolewe. An exploratory descent can be made by continuing along the ridge, or beside the lochans, before descending rough ground to Boor Burn. There is a hydro-electric scheme here, and its track takes you down to the road. Follow the road, or the shore once round the first bend, to Poolewe.

## 38. Cove North Coast

*Start: car park at very end of road B8057  
NG 814 920*

*Grade **D 2**, Length 4 km x2, Up 40 m  
Coastal scenery and a memorial*



Drive the single-track road from Poolewe to Cove along the west side of Loch Ewe, through several townships to its end beyond Cove. The headland here is the site of wartime gun emplacements, protecting the entrance to Loch Ewe which was a major assembly point for convoys to Russia and the USA. From the car park go through a gate and across the salt flats, then follow the coast as far as you like. The walking is mostly easy on sheep paths and well-cropped grass. The coast is Torridonian Sandstone as usual. You will reach a bay with a memorial to the American ship *SS William H Welch* which sank in 1944 near the island Eilean Furadh Mor, with the loss of 62 lives. Return the same way, or venture further inland.

**Extension (D 5, extra 7 km).** You can make a circuit from the bay by following the coast all the way to Camas Mor (see Walk 35), but it is hard work. Once there you can follow the path to Lochandraing ruined village, and then take the village track north east between the two lochs to reach the sea; the track is well-made but may be waterlogged in places.

## 39. Kernsary Circuit

*Start: Poolewe car park NG 858 808*

*Grade **B 3**, Length 11 km, Up 110 m*

*Varied scenery on a popular circuit of  
Loch Kernsary*



*Looking back over Loch Kernsary, with  
Beinn Airigh Charr in the background*

This circular walk can be done in either direction; here the anti-clockwise route is described. From Poolewe follow the tarred road up the left (east) side of the River Ewe, past the Free Church. This becomes a private road (no cars). Where the very short river becomes Loch Maree you pass the site below of the Red Smiddy, 500-year old ironworks (may be bracken-covered). Continue through woodland. After Inveran House the track becomes gravel. Go through a gate to enter Letterewe Estate. The track finally reaches a concrete river-crossing: cross this and keep left up to the former farmhouse of Kernsary, now a keeper's house. Pass the house, go through a gate and immediately turn left. Follow the fence downhill and cross a bridge, then cross a field gaining height to find a footpath. This path soon enters Inverewe Estate (National Trust for Scotland), and follows the shore of Loch Kernsary to its end; there are a few rocky steps which need care. See if you can spot the outflow from the loch, which is in an unexpected place. After the loch the path crosses a burn before a short steep climb. It then continues easily, reaching the main road and Loch Ewe half-way round the bay. Turn left to return to your start.

**Extension to Ardlair.** The track which keeps right at the concrete river crossing leads in 4 km down to modern Ardlair Lodge beside Loch Maree, where the shore and woodlands can be walked. There is a short-cut to this track which starts not far beyond small Loch an Doire Ghairbh (after the gate) at a cairn; this trodden path is boggy in places.

## 40. Inverewe

### The Garden

Inverewe Garden and Estate, just north of Poolewe, belong to the National Trust for Scotland. The garden is the only walk in this guide which requires an entry payment (unless you are a Member of the NTS or NT). The path network is about 7 km long: you can walk all the paths in about 2 hours if you can work out a route! But of course that is no way to treat one of the UK's greatest gardens. You are given a plan on entry; the version below divides the garden into areas, and gives a minimum suggested circuit.



### Inverewe Peninsula

It is possible to leave the garden through a gate at its north end and visit the Inverewe peninsula (on its far side there is a seal colony). But the path is minimal and beyond the trees there are deer fences and very rough ground. There are plans to improve access to the peninsula, but meanwhile it is not recommended.

### Woodland Trails

Grade **A 2**, Length 2 km, Up 40 m

There is a small well-made path system across the road from the car park, starting beside the restaurant. It is mostly in woodland. The shorter, lower circuit is called the Inverewe Trail. The longer and more strenuous circuit turns left and climbs up through conifers; it is called the Pinewood Trail. Look out for red squirrels, recently introduced here and in the garden. It is worth stopping at the Wildlife Hide on the way back to the car park, especially if the tide is low.





# The Great Wilderness



The area between Loch Maree and Little Loch Broom has become conveniently known as the Great Wilderness, largely thanks to the Great Wilderness Challenge, an annual charity walk/run across it. On the map it is a group of 'Forests', a word which does not imply trees but open areas used for deer-stalking by the various estates. The Forests are, from the north: Strathnasheallag, Fisherfield, Letterewe, and part of Kinlochewe.

The word 'Wilderness' is controversial, because even here humans have affected the land; but the effects have been small, and no-one lives in the area now (Letterewe, a Lodge with many other buildings beside Loch Maree, is on its edge). The word 'Great' is less controversial: this is a unique area of rocky mountains, crags and lochs with unmatched scenery. The Ordnance Survey's 'remotest point in the UK' lies within it.

The GW is walking country on a grand scale. There are paths made for stalking, fishing, crofting and cattle-droving. There are two long A-to-B walks (1 and 2), but most walks

are out-and-back unless you are happy to cut cross-country. The best way to explore the area is by devising your own multi-day walks, spending the night(s) in a tent or bivouac, or in one of the two open bothies shown in white on the map: **Carnmore** is a very basic byre near Carnmore Lodge; **Shenavall** is a slightly more civilised house.

**1 The original east-west route**, 32 km. Once used by cattle-drovers and postmen, this mostly follows the edge of the Great Wilderness. South of Letterewe the path is beset by bracken but still walkable (see Walk 9), and careful navigation is needed at Letterewe although there are helpful signs. You can leave a car at Poolewe and take the bus to the start at the Incheril turning beyond Kinlochewe (Westerbus: Tue, Thur, Fri 08.10: 01445 712255).

**2 The only GW crossing**, 40 km. This is the route used by the annual GW Challenge (the record is 2 hours 43 minutes). It passes the two bothies. There is a path all the way, but also two river crossings near Shenavall which are normally not too difficult, but impassable after heavy rain. The path is mostly good, but there are rough stretches descending to each of the bothies. You can leave a car at Poolewe and take the bus to Corriehallie beyond Dundonnell (Westerbus: Mon, Wed, Sat 08.05: 01445 712255). The Corriehallie lay-by is often full, used by An Teallach climbers and Shenavall visitors. The first part of the walk, 3.5 km to the highest point and back, is worth doing on its own.

**3 Track to Fionn Loch** from Drumchork: scenic but the track is deteriorating.

**4 Track to Fionn Loch** starting from A832 at a bend 1km east of Second Coast (Walk 45): can link with 3 and 2.

**5 Path from road bridge up Little Gruinard River**: starts rough but improves.

**6 Path from Gruinard Beach up Inverianvie River**, rough and difficult in places.

**7 Easy track along Gruinard River to Loch na Sealga** (see Walk 47).

**8 Rough path to ruined villages** (Walk 48) and beyond to Loch na Sealga: cannot be linked with 7 as Gruinard River is uncrossable.

**9 Up the first, steep part of Ardesie Burn** (Walk 50).

**10 Path used to climb An Teallach**: strenuous, reaching a strange desert-like plateau. Path tends to split, following several alternative routes.

**11 Lengthy approach to the GW and Shenavall bothy** from the road at Loch a' Bhraoin. A cross-country route (on the Cape Wrath Trail) leads to Kinlochewe.

**12 Track and path to Lochan Fada** (see page 7).

**13 Up Gleann Bianasdail to Lochan Fada**: can link with 12 by a river crossing (see page 7).

**14 Path from Letterewe to Lochan Fada**, reaching 520m at the end of Beinn Lair: a pathless route can then be made along the loch shore, Gleann Tulacha with Beinn Lair's cliffs above, and Bealach a' Chuirn to reach route 15 and Carnmore.

**15 Path over Bealach Mheinnidh**, a 500m pass, to Fionn Loch and Carnmore.

**16 Track from Kernsary** (Walk 39 extension) to **Ardlair Lodge and Loch Maree** shore and woodland. A path branches off it (from just before a small quarry) round the foot of Beinn Airigh Charr (or up the NW corrie of the hill).

**17 Track from Kernsary** (see Walk 39) to **Fionn Loch**: can link with 3 and 4.

**18 Stalkers' path from Carnmore** into remote country: link with 7 possible but rough.

**19 Hill-walkers' path to the col between Ruadh Stac Mor and A' Mhaighdean**, Scotland's remotest two Munros.

# LAIDE

## 41. Laide Wood

*Beside the A832 1km south of Laide  
NG 893907*

*Car park 2.1m height limit*

*Grade **A 2**, Length 2 km, Up 30 m*

*Paths through a community woodland*

A former forestry scheme was bought from the Forestry Commission by the community of Laide in 2003, and has been developed since then by volunteers. The work has involved clearing fallen timber and brash, making and maintaining paths, building bridges, putting up interpretation signs, felling unwanted trees, re-planting some areas with deciduous trees, encouraging wildlife, building a wildlife hide, organising walks and activities, and more. The main aim is to enhance biodiversity and encourage recreational use. Two exceptional weather events did not help: the great storm of 2005 which decimated many local woods, and the great flood of 2014. (The Old Butts were part of a shooting range used for Territorial Army practice.)



## 42. Slaggan

*Start: quarry at NG 887 941*

*Grade **A 2**, Length 5 km x2, Up 30 m*

*Track to beach and deserted village*

Drive the small road north from Laide, and in 2.5 km there is a green sign on the left to Slaggan Bay. Just beyond on the right there is a quarry for parking. The loch across the road, Loch na Beiste, was once the home of a troublesome beast

(a kelpie?). The track to Slaggan is still a public road (4WD only), but rarely driven. To the left as you start there is a ruined village, Altantarsin, which had 9 households in 1841 and none in 1851: presumably it was 'cleared' by the landowner. You may meet Highland cattle on the track: they are usually harmless, but be careful! It is an easy walk to Slaggan, an isolated bay with a beach. Don't bathe here as there are dangerous currents. There was a village here, with 31 inhabitants in 1931; the ruined house was the last to be occupied, and was burnt down in 1943. Return the same way.

**Extension** (**D 2**, extra 3 km, 120 m). If transport allows, you can continue to Mellon Charles, following rough paths round the coast and finally climbing up to a ridge where a military track leads down to the road end.



## 43. Mellon Udrigle

*Start: car park at the beach NG 890 959*

*Grade **C 2**, Length 5 km, Up 50 m*

*Beach and coastal rock scenery*



The road north from Laide takes you to the popular Mellon Udrigle beach. The strange name is a mixture of Gaelic (meallan, small hill) and Norse (outer gill or inlet). This walk finishes at the beach. From the car park go back to the road, turn right (sign 'Rubha Beag circular path 3.5 km'). At the corner continue ahead on an old track which takes you cross-country to a small estuary. Turn right and slowly follow the coastline all the way back to Mellon Udrigle, with sandstone formations and views north. When you reach the beach, it is worth continuing to its south end. On the way back to the car park a path up left visits a very large prehistoric circle which may have been a roundhouse or a wheelhouse.

## 44. Greenstone Point

*Start: Opinan road quarry NG 876 968*

*Grade **D 4**, Length 17 km, Up 100 m*

*Coastal sandstone scenery and views, with road-walking/cycling*



Greenstone Point

This is a long circuit of the peninsula, round the coast and returning by the Slaggan track (Walk 42) and the road; to avoid road-walking, you could leave a bicycle at the Slaggan car park: see opposite. Drive north from Laide, and just before you reach Mellon Udrigle beach turn left to Opinan: this road ends in a turning circle, but there is parking in a road quarry before that. From Opinan follow the coast to Greenstone Point. The coast is made of slabby Torridonian Sandstone, and you should discover how well designed this rock is for walking on! There are many inlets: you can either take short-cuts between these or keep strictly and tiringly to the coast. The Point itself has a lichen-covered sandstone tower, which may explain the name. The view north reaches as far as Foinaven, 20 miles short of the north coast of Scotland: here are the hills —

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
										
1 Foinaven			4 Quinag			7 Canisp			10 Cul Beag	
2 Ben Stack			5 Glas Bheinn			8 Stac Pollaidh			11 Ben Mor Coigach	
3 Arkle			6 Suilven			9 Cul Mor				

After Greenstone Point you could return the way you came, but this walk follows the coast all the way to Slaggan Bay. The walking is easier, with no inlets. Just inland there are at least a dozen lochs or lochans. Reach the point called Gob a' Gheodha and turn left to the beach at Slaggan: see Walk 42 (where you are warned not to bathe here). Follow the Slaggan track east to the road, then follow the road back to your start.



# GRUINARD

## 45. To Fionn Loch

*Start: improvised parking near start  
NG 935 899*

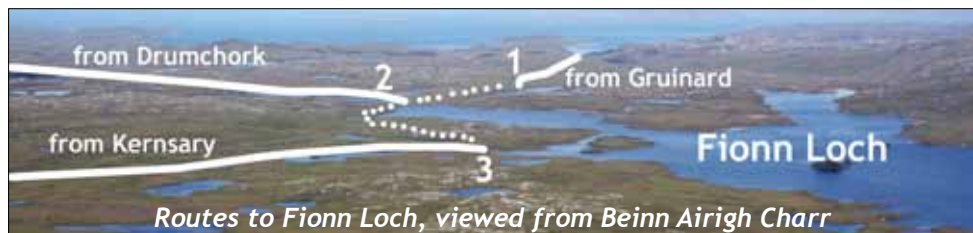
*Grade **A 3**, Length 8 km x2, Up 110 m*

*Track through remote country*

This walk follows one of the three tracks which lead to Fionn Loch, the big loch which reaches into the heart of the Great Wilderness and is a favourite of anglers (see the map on page 28). The others start at Kernsary (see Walk 39), and at Drumchork above Aultbea. The three routes can be linked, most easily in dry conditions.

This (Route 1 on the picture below) is the easiest approach to Fionn Loch, a modern bulldozed track. It starts at the last bend in the A832 before Gruinard Hill where there is a little rough parking. It takes you through remote country to finish at the branch of Fionn Loch which is the start of Little Gruinard River. You then return the same way, or ...

**Alternatives.** If transport allows, you can follow the rough shore 1.2 km further to reach Fionn Loch proper and the next track, Route 2 (*below*). Another 2 km takes you to Route 3.



### Gruinard's Rivers and their paths

Three rivers flow out of the Great Wilderness into Gruinard Bay, emerging unusually close together. They were a problem for early road builders: Gruinard River, the biggest, was not bridged until the early 1900s. Each river has a path up it.

**Little Gruinard River** drains Fionn Loch, and reaches the sea at the foot of the steep Gruinard Hill (another road-building challenge). There is a small rough fishermen's path from the bridge up the west side of the river for about 3 km.

**Inverianvie River** drains the remote glen Toll a' Mhadaidh and two lochs. There is a difficult path (**B/E 3**, Length 3 km x2, Up 200 m) up its east side from the beach car park, brackened at first and with some rock-scrambling sections which need care: it is worth following to its end in remote country around Loch a' Mhadaidh Mhor. Take a map.

**Gruinard River** flows from the big Loch na Sealga and drains a large proportion of the Great Wilderness. There is a good track up its west side 8.5 km to the loch.

## 46. Hill, River, Beach

*Start: Gruinard Beach car park*  
NG 951 898

*Grade **E/A 4**, Length 8 km, Up 180 m*  
*Varied strenuous circuit*

It is important to time this walk so that the tide is low when you finish along the beach. It is also better in summer.

**(1) Hill.** This part of the walk needs careful navigation: the white line shows the route. From the popular beach car park, cross the fence and head inland for about 200 metres on small paths, through bracken, and briefly on a track. Then an easy rock-free route can be found up the hillside to the left. At the top of this climb it is worth visiting a rocky knoll to the left for the view. Next you head south east (i.e. turning right after the climb) heading inland along a shallow valley below slabs and crags of Lewisian Gneiss, with some boggy bits to avoid. Aim for a prominent cliff (*arrowed*) at the valley's end. When you reach this cliff you will find a small loch (Lochan Dubh) below it: a good spot for refreshments. Go round to the right of the lochan and continue on the same line, climbing gradually. Over the final rise turn left (due east) and pass another lochan below. (You may want to explore some of the rocky hill-tops around here: typical knobbly Gneiss with dark 'Scourie Dykes'.) Keep going east into a valley to the right of a low hill, and find a way down the slopes to Gruinard River with care: the ground gets rougher as you descend.

**(2) River.** Turn left on the track and follow it to the road, avoiding tempting shortcuts. The river is popular for salmon fishing. **Extension:** to the right the track goes 5 km to Loch na Sealga: a good walk, but you have to come back the same way.

**(3) Beach.** At the main road, cross over and take a path which leads down to the beach, going through two gates (or the by-pass). You can see signs of old agriculture to the left. If the tide is out you can follow the beach back to your start. **Otherwise...** (a) you may still be able to follow the shore with some rock-scrambling. Or (b) if you can reach the bouldery neck of the peninsula beyond the dunes, cross it and follow a path above the shore for a while, then continue on small paths through the birches until forced up to the road for the last stretch. Or (c) go back to walk the road.



## 47. Deserted villages

*Start: Roadside just west of Gruinard River NG 961 911*

*Grade **C 3**, Length 6 km x2, Up 220 m x2*

*Old path to two deserted villages: map useful*

This walk is best done before the bracken has grown. Park on the roadside west of the bridge, then walk across the bridge and turn right on a track. Follow the track until soon after two blue sheds it turns left to a cottage: leave it and follow bits of path/track along the river. The path eventually improves and climbs uphill. Beyond the rise is the old much-studied township called Glenarigolach; people lived here in prehistoric times,

the village was shown on Pont's map around 1590, and it was cleared for sheep-farming in 1840. The path continues over the hill to another, smaller settlement called Craigour. Return the same way.

**Extension.** After Craigour, the path goes on for 7 km, passing two lochs and finally descending to the shore of Loch na Sealga which it follows back to the start of Gruinard River. There was once a footbridge here, but now the river cannot be crossed to link with the track up its other side: so you have to return the same way. Map needed.



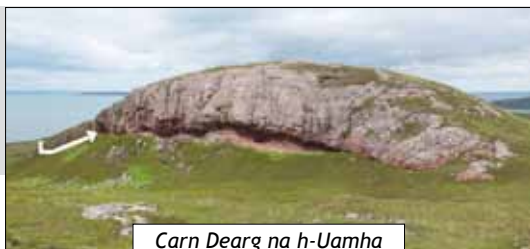
Part of Glenarigolach

## 48. Stattic Point

*Start: lay-by at NG 961 929*

*Grade **D 3**, Length 9 km, Up 250 m*

*Pathless coast and hill walk with geological interest: map useful*



Carn Dearg na h-Uamha

This walk needs fine dry weather. From the A832 lay-by directly opposite Gruinard Island, follow the

roadside to a gate through a deer fence. Take a path through the dunes and turn right across Mungasdale beach, crossing a burn. Now follow the coast, staying on grassy ground close to the shore to avoid mud made by livestock, and gorse. Go round the seaward end of a fence. Above is an impressive series of fields which must have cost a great deal of work; the undulating ground underfoot means that you are crossing their predecessors, 'lazybeds'. Soon the deer fence has to be re-crossed: you can do this with care on rock at its seaward end. Continue along the shore, either enjoying the stones, boulders and rock or keeping off them on the grass above. You have a good chance of seeing a Sea Eagle. After about 1 km walk well above the shore which grows increasingly rocky. As you approach the oddly named Stattic Point, note a prominent sandstone block on the shore below you: this is a good example of the 'Stac Fada' rock, chaotic sandstone affected by a huge meteorite which landed to the north 1200 million years ago. Look closely at it and you can see grey-green patches which are vitrified rock, turned to glass by the impact. About 100 metres beyond it you come to the Point.

After lunching here, walk slowly uphill to the south. Carn Dearg Ailein, the first hill, is optional: go left to avoid its top. The next hill is Carn Dearg na h-Uamha ('red hill of the cave'). Circle it to its right (west) and round the back of it find the 'cave', really an overhung ledge (see the picture above). Walk along the ledge as far as you like. It is an extraordinary place, made when a softer layer of rock was weathered out. The upper sandstone (Diabaig Formation, 1000 million years old) includes chunks of itself – can you work out how this happened? The lower sandstone is 200 million years older.

Go down to the fence. Now you have a choice of return routes. The easier route takes a rising traverse across the slope to the right (west) and crosses a low col. Or else you can go over the higher hills ahead, where the rock is Gneiss (the sandstone has been eroded off them): climb the highest one, Carn Dearg an Droma (186m). From either, descend to the deer fence avoiding crags, go round the end of it as before, and return to the beach.

# LITTLE LOCH BROOM

## 49. Ardessie Burn

*Start: waterworks building at  
NH 050 896*

*Grade **C 2**, Length 2.5 km, Up 230 m  
Waterfalls, ravines and rock*



Ardessie Burn is very special. But there is a dilemma: which side is better to walk up? Opinions differ. If the water is low you might manage both by crossing, either just below the most prominent waterfall less than halfway up, or at the top above all the waterfalls using boulders. Walk along the road from the parking space (2½ miles west of Dundonnell Hotel) and look over both sides of the road bridge.

To walk up the east side, which is easier with more of a path, continue along the road a short way, then turn uphill. To walk up the west side, which has less clear paths but more rock, if you are athletic you can climb onto the right end of the bridge fence and use a tree above to reach the top; alternatively, walk back along the road until you can see a way up. On either side, keep as close as possible to the burn as you climb up the path(s), stopping to explore and admire waterfalls, small ravines, cascades, and the Torridonian Sandstone exposed by floods. Go as far as you like. Above the most prominent waterfall the burn begins to change, entering a ravine which you can only glimpse in a few places. Above that again, a great canyon opens out, with a series of high waterfalls in it: again hard to see (best from the west), especially when there are leaves on the trees. Finally the drama finishes and the burn levels off, going through boulder fields churned up by the 2014 flood. Much of the bare rock you saw lower down was also uncovered by this flood, and the debris closed the road.

## 50. Scoraig

*Start: if possible, at Badrallach road end NG 055 918*

*Grade **A 3**, Length 8 km x2, Up 50 m*

*Path to a remote inhabited village*

Take the small side road to Badrallach which leaves the A832 at NH 113 856. This is not an easy drive, climbing to a col from which Ullapool is only 3 km away, and on to the village of Badrallach. There is limited parking at the road end. A good path leads along above the coast, rounding a steep headland, to the scattered village of Scoraig. In 1871 it had 380 inhabitants, but it had none when it was re-colonised by incomers a hundred years later. It is cut off from services (you will notice the wind turbines, many of them home-made or home-designed), but popular with those who like to be away from it all, and not quite as eccentric now as it was in the early days. There is a school, a fine village hall, and a small display in an unexpected lighthouse (originally on Cailleach Head at the end of the peninsula). Walk as far as the jetty, from which the villagers' ferry takes them across to Badluarach on the 'mainland'. Return the same way.

• **There is one more walk** in this area to mention: the start of the Great Wilderness crossing (page 29, route 2). Walk the track from Corriehallie lay-by on the main road to its highest point and back (3.5 km, mostly uphill), with glimpses of An Teallach.



## Scottish Access Law

In 1993 landowner Paul van Vlissingen drew up the 'Letterewe Accord', which gave ramblers, climbers and others unlimited public access to his land (a large part of the Great Wilderness) in exchange for a pledge of responsible conduct. This was the prototype of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act which came into force in 2005. This law gives everyone rights of access over land and inland water throughout Scotland, subject to specific exclusions set out in the Act (e.g. gardens, business premises, farmyards) and responsible behaviour. These rights are sometimes referred to as 'freedom to roam'. Landowners are also expected to behave responsibly. The responsibilities are set out in the Scottish Access Code. Some of those which apply to walkers in Wester Ross are:

- take **responsibility** for your own actions – e.g. care for your own safety, keep alert for hazards, take special care with children.
- respect people's **privacy** and peace of mind – e.g. do not act in ways that might annoy or alarm people.
- help **land managers and others** to work safely and effectively – e.g. keep clear of land management operations like tree-felling or deer-stalking, leave gates as you find them.
- care for your **environment** – e.g. don't disturb wildlife, take your litter away with you.
- keep your **dog** under proper control: dogs are popular companions, but take special care if near livestock, or during the bird breeding season, and always pick up after your dog.
- **cyclists** have the same rights as pedestrians, but should avoid wet, boggy or soft ground (this is important here where many paths are on peat).

Scotland has a highly enlightened attitude to public access, but it must not be abused.

## The Meaning of Wildness : a controversy

*(what do you think?)*

Wester Ross is called wild: is it? It includes three Wild Land Areas: what does that mean? And there is the Great Wilderness: is it really wild? What does wild mean?

One definition of wild is 'unvisited by humans': but humans have been everywhere, so nowhere is wild. Another definition is 'unaltered by humans', which is more meaningful: most high ground is then wild, unless worn human paths and built cairns can be said to cancel the wildness. But these definitions do not make wild a useful word. And by the way, how big is wild? Can a square metre be wild?

A suggestion: a place can be called wild if nature is allowed to do its own natural wild thing, unaffected by humans. Then a place abandoned by humans could revert to wildness. When humans build, plant, farm, graze their animals, hunt or cull deer, burn, dam, exploit, cut down and generally alter, a place is not wild; but when they stop, nature takes over and the land starts to become wild again. Anyone who has a garden understands this!

'Re-wilding' today usually means taking action to force the land to be what we believe to be wild, often by planting trees on it or killing deer. But these are human activities, and so they are really de-wilding. "But if humans removed the trees, shouldn't we replace them?" In many places, perhaps: but on moorland what stopped the trees from growing was nature, when the climate changed (around 2000 BC). Planting trees on unwooded moorland is an act of impatience and self-defeating, especially if it is on peat, the best carbon sink of all. Let nature do any planting, then it will be truly wild, even if wild deer feed on it.

So we can call most of Wester Ross wild, its hills and moorland. Some of it is on the way to being wild. A little of it is unwild, mostly in and around the villages and roadsides. Abandoned townships and fields are becoming wild again, trees will return if they want to, deer are wild and natural even if they have no predators (and predators made little difference to their population). There are places where humans are drastically de-wilding with bulldozed tracks, dams, fences, plantations – and these may be regrettable or may be necessary for a good reason. But in most of our wonderful land wild nature is in charge.

## List of walks in approximate order of difficulty

\* = extensions described R = return the same way T = transport needed at both ends

grade	km	m	page	no	walk	grade	km	m	page	no	walk
A 1	4	100	3	4	Coire Mhic Nobuill * R	C 2	5.5	190	15	22	Fairy Lochs
A 1	8	50	7	8	River Bruachaig * R	A 3	10	280	9	12	Glen Grudie R
A 1/2	2	40	27	40	Inverewe Woodland	C 2	6	160	24	35	Lighthouse and Coast * R
A 2	2.5	30	19	29	Gairloch Beach/Harbour	C 3	7	160	12	16	Waterfall Circuit
A 2	2	30	30	41	Laide Wood	C 3	9	40	7	9	To Loch Maree * R
C 1	3	40	16	25	Sron na Carra	B 3	11	110	26	39	Kernsary Circuit
B 1	5	120	4	6	The Hundred Hills * R	D 2-3	10	150	23	34	Coast North of Melvaig
B 2	4.5	80	18	28	Flowerdale Waterfall	E 3	4	50	10	14	Loch Maree Islands
C 2	3	40	22	32	Sand Archaeology Trail	C 3	12	440	33	47	Deserted Villages * R
B 2	4	100	20	30	Achtercairn Arch. Trail *	A 3	16	50	35	50	Scoraig R
C 2	5	50	31	43	Mellon Udrigle	A 4	16	110	32	45	To Fionn Loch (R)
D 2	8	40	26	38	Cove North Coast * R	B 4	14	260	16	24	Loch Gaineamheach * R
D 2	6	40	17	26	Red Point	B 3	9	200	25	36	Tollie Path T / *
A 2	10	30	30	42	Slaggan * R	D 4	9	160	23	33	North Erradale Coast
B 2	5	30	13	19	Old Road T	A 4	14	520	4	5	Coire Mhic Fhearchair R
A/C 2	4	80	2	1	Shieldaig Peninsula	B 4	14	320	12	17	Loch na h-Oidhche * R
D 2	3.5	190	25	37	Cliff Hill *	B/E 4	7	250	8	10	Below Beinn Eighe
A/D 2	6	140	16	23	Horrisdale Hydro	E 3	4.5	220	21	31	Gneiss and Sandstone
B 2	7	140	11	15	Slattadale Paths	D 3	9	250	34	48	Stattic Point
A 2	9	20	5	7	Lochs Clair and Coulin	E/A 4	8	180	33	46	Hill, River, Beach
B 3	16	80	17	27	Craig * R	D 4	17	100	31	44	Greenstone Point
B 2	8.5	40	2	2	Loch Torridon South	E 4	6	190	13	18	North of the Stable R
D 2	5	40	9	13	Loch Maree Shore	E 3	3	100	14	21	Coille Dhubh
C 2	2.5	230	35	49	Ardessie Burn	A/D 4	13	420	3	3	B. na h-Eaglaise circuit
D 2	4.5	50	14	20	Coille Airigh na Cloiche	B 5	5.5	560	8	11	Mountain Trail

### Place Names

Most of the place names here are Gaelic (*rubha rèidh*). Many are anglicised Gaelic (*Gairloch = gearr loch, short loch*), some are English (*greenstone point*). Some derive from Norse, the Viking language (*Diabaig = djup vik, deep bay*).

The names were recorded in the 1800s by the early Ordnance Survey field surveyors who interviewed local people. The responses given often seem to be simply descriptions (*beinn dhearg mhòr = big red hill*), but many refer to landscape features (*file mountain, spearhead*), land use (*high shieling, cairn field*), legends (*Martha's peak*), people (*loch of the cleric, corrie of Farquhar's son*), or wildlife (*deer hill, bird loch*). The meanings of some Gaelic names are uncertain (*baosbheinn*).

There is Walking, and there is a Walk: the first mere travelling from A to B, eyes down, filling time with thought and talk, unaware there's anything to see. But on a Walk the context is the thing: the eyes alert to look, the ears to hear, the mind to question, and the heart to sing the wonders of the scene both far and near: sea and loch, and pool and sparkling burn, rock and mountain, beast and bird and tree, sky and cloud, and flowering plant and fern – nature's wealth laid out for us to see: each creature keen to tell us its own story, with its own song to sing its Maker's glory.



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