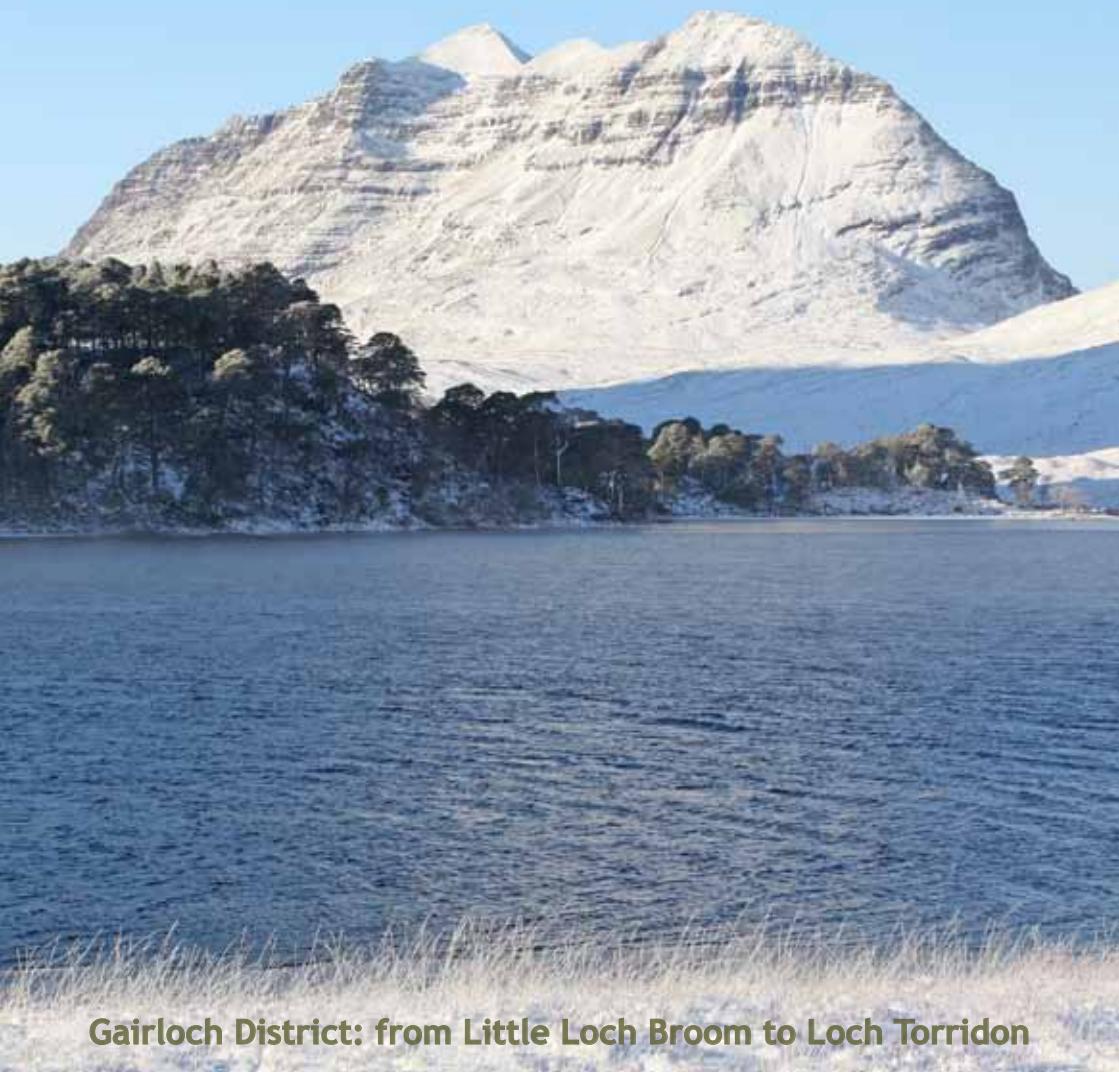


HILLS of Wester Ross



Gairloch District: from Little Loch Broom to Loch Torridon

The central part of Wester Ross, from Little Loch Broom to Loch Torridon, is privileged to have an unmatched collection of mountains – or rather hills, as they are traditionally known in Scotland. The main service centre of this area is Gairloch, from which they can all be reached.

The aim of this booklet is to introduce these hills to both active and armchair hill-walkers. It is not a complete guide; for that you need something like the SMC North West Highlands guide, plus a good map. But it contains hints from local knowledge, relevant geological information, and a lot of pictures. Fine weather is assumed (yes, there *are* fine days here!): if possible, don't climb these hills without it, unless you enjoy the mere exercise or the navigational challenge, or you are simply bagging summits (*p20*)! And remember that in snowy winter conditions hill-walking is transformed into a different and more technical sport – mountaineering.

Our hills are not high by continental standards, but while the greater ranges are still rising or being worn down (which may take only 50 million years), ours have been carved by ice out of truly ancient rocks: gneiss (*p11*), amphibolite (*p19*), sandstone (*p23*), and quartzite (*p27*), each with its own distinct character as you walk on it. This geology, everywhere visible, explains why the landscape here is so much rockier, rougher and more varied than the land further east, which was overrun by the softer rock of the mountain-building Moine Thrust (*p35*).

Be warned: our hills are not easy. We may call them hills, but most are serious mountains. The terrain is rough and often pathless; ascents may be steep and start from near sea level; cliffs, narrow ridges and scree are common; many of the hills are among the remotest in Scotland; the weather can be unreliable. When the word “scrambling” is used, it means climbing on rock without a rope, sometimes exposed and always needing great care. Carelessness in the hills can kill.

You attempt the routes and hills in this guide at your own risk.

- 1 The Great Wilderness:** Little Loch Broom to Loch Maree
- 18 Gairloch Minis:** small hills east of Gairloch
- 21 Torridon:** Loch Maree to Loch Torridon
- 33 Coulin:** south of Glen/Loch Torridon

*front cover:
Liathach from
Loch Clair*
*back cover:
sunrise to sunset*

MAPS

Great Wilderness: OS Landranger 19
Torridon: OS Explorer 433, or Harvey's
Coulin exc. Beinn Damh: OS Landranger 25

HILL CATEGORIES (*number in this area*)

Munros (14): 3000ft / 914.4m
Corbetts (12): 2500ft / 762.0m
Grahams (5): 2000ft / 609.6m

OTHER GUIDES in this series

Gairloch and District: general guide
Wester Ross Rocks: geology
Wild Wester Ross: wildlife (flora & fauna)
The Story of Gairloch: history
Roundhouses of Wester Ross: archaeology

Asleep I dream of a favourite hill,
find myself easily effortlessly
striding up steep golden slopes
scaling ramparts of sun-warmed sandstone
scampering carefree above sharp-cut cliffs
leaping light-footed from rock to rock
soaring to the high-aspiring summit –
and on beyond into a shining sky
until flight fails and I am falling, falling,
wake with a shock, and know the sad reality:
the hill is true, but
I have yet to grow angel wings.

*produced by Jeremy Fenton
jeremyfenton@btinternet.com*

The GREAT WILDERNESS



This name is often used for the area between Little Loch Broom and Loch Maree, properly Strathnasheallag, Fisherfield and Letterewe. It is a wild wonderland, unsurpassed in Britain: a maze of craggy hills, ridges and lochs. The Ordnance Survey puts the “remotest spot in Britain” at its centre (NH 02020 77000). A majority of the hills need more than a day-trip.

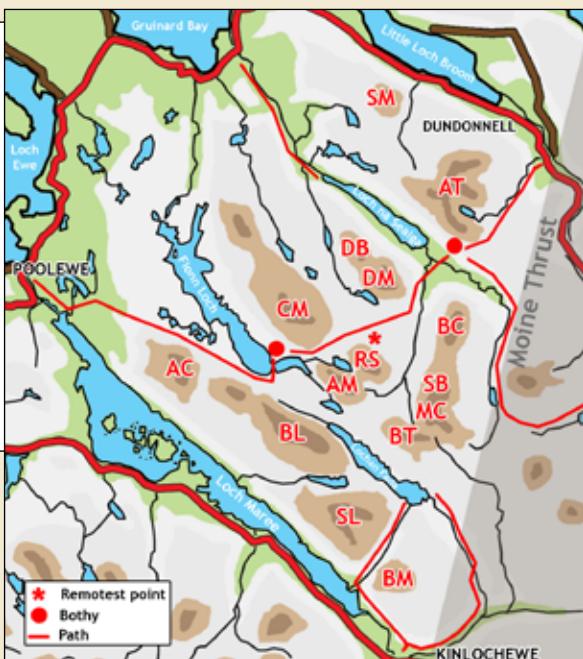
AC	Beinn Airigh Charr	p 14
AM	A' Mhaighdean	p 12
AT	An Teallach	p 4
BC	Beinn a' Chlaidheimh	p 6
BL	Beinn Lair	p 15
BM	Beinn a' Mhuinidh	p 17
BT	Beinn Tarsuinn	p 7
CM	Beinn a' Chaisgein Mor	p 10
DB	Beinn Dearg Beag	p 9
DM	Beinn Dearg Mor	p 8
MC	Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair	p 7
RS	Ruadh Stac Mor	p 11
SB	Sgurr Ban	p 6
SL	Slioch	p 16
SM	Sail Mhor	p 3

Six PATHS head into the Great Wilderness; two of these join to make a crossing, and are used for an annual one-day 25-mile charity walk. But it is really a region to wander in and explore for several days with a tent.

There are also two open BOTHIES:

Carnmore is a shooting lodge at the head of Fionn Loch, and its stable is now a simple bothy (p10). Nearby an artificial causeway separates Fionn and Dubh Lochs (a fine place to camp). It was the subject of a court case about fishing rights, which reached the House of Lords: are the lochs really two, or one? The answer was two.

Shenavall bothy is a house in Strath na Sealga (p8), a once well-populated glen which was cleared for sheep farming in the early 1800s. From the south west two river crossings are needed to reach it.



Great Wilderness Scenery



SAIL MHOR

Sail Mhor is a prominent lump of a hill, sometimes known as the Plum Pudding. It is an outlier of An Teallach, standing above Little Loch Broom at the north corner of the Great Wilderness, with fine sea views to the north. It is, for this area, an unusually easy hill to climb by the normal route from the back, but steepness and roughness can be found on its east face if that's what you want. Its sandstone is typical: lovely to walk on and to look at.

Park at the waterworks 100m west of Ardessie Burn bridge. The usual route follows the west side of this burn, veering right at the top to climb across the flank of the hill, and then right again to cross the shallow southern corrie to its further ridge. This climbs pleasantly to the summit with small optional scrambles. The descent can be varied by circling the corrie, crossing a strange stony sandy area made barren by wind or lying snow. Return to the burn. If possible, cross it and descend the other side back to the road. Why?

Because **Ardessie Burn** is very special. It is possibly the best small river in Scotland. Follow each bank as closely as possible: a wonderfully varied series of many waterfalls, small and large ravines, lots of bare beautiful sandstone; small-scale at first, but at the top four large waterfalls plunge into a deep gorge (harder to see when leaves are on the trees). Take plenty of time over it, and a camera.



from the south



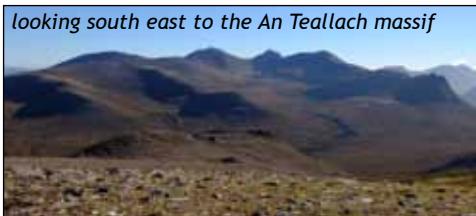
fellow climbers: feral goats



looking north to Scoraig and the Summer Isles



looking south east to the An Teallach massif



* The pronunciation of the Gaelic names given in this booklet is approximate; it may vary from district to district.

AN TEALLACH

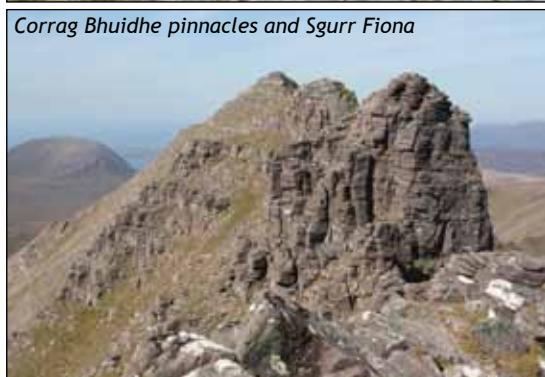
Magnificent An Teallach is a sprawling constellation of ridges, tops and corries. To many it is the finest Scottish hill, although supporters of Liathach (p28) will not agree. It is less accessible and more complicated than Liathach, and the full traverse makes a longer day. It is also a more retiring hill: from the road there are only tantalising glimpses of it until you reach the moorlands to the east where fine distant views appear. It is almost all sandstone, with quartzite only on the eastern tops. There are often herds of feral goats on the ridges. Being isolated, An Teallach tends to make its own weather.

The choice of routes is bewildering; the only answer is to climb the hill many times. Ideally any traverse should feature:

- The summit, **Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill**: surprisingly easy, a superb viewpoint with a pinnacled but walkable east ridge.
- The second Munro, **Sgurr Fiona**: a steep rocky pyramid poised 550m above the corrie Toll an Lochain.
- **Lord Berkeley's Seat**: a remarkable pinnacle with an overhanging east face. It is easy to scramble across, but whoever Lord Berkeley was, he was a brave man.
- **Corrag Bhuidhe pinnacles**: the hardest of the three major sets of Torridonian pinnacles (with Liathach and Beinn Alligin), intimidating but not as impossible as they look. However, the climb up their south end is an exposed rock climb and to be avoided by most. They can all be avoided by sandy paths on their west side.
- **Toll an Lochain**: the two great eastern corries are both called "Toll" (hollow or hole). This one matches the corries of Beinn Eighe and Liathach for grandeur; a visit to its lochan is a must. From it the ridge can be reached to the south via the steep Cadha Gobhlach gully, or up the slopes on the north side with careful route selection.



from the quartzite escarpment



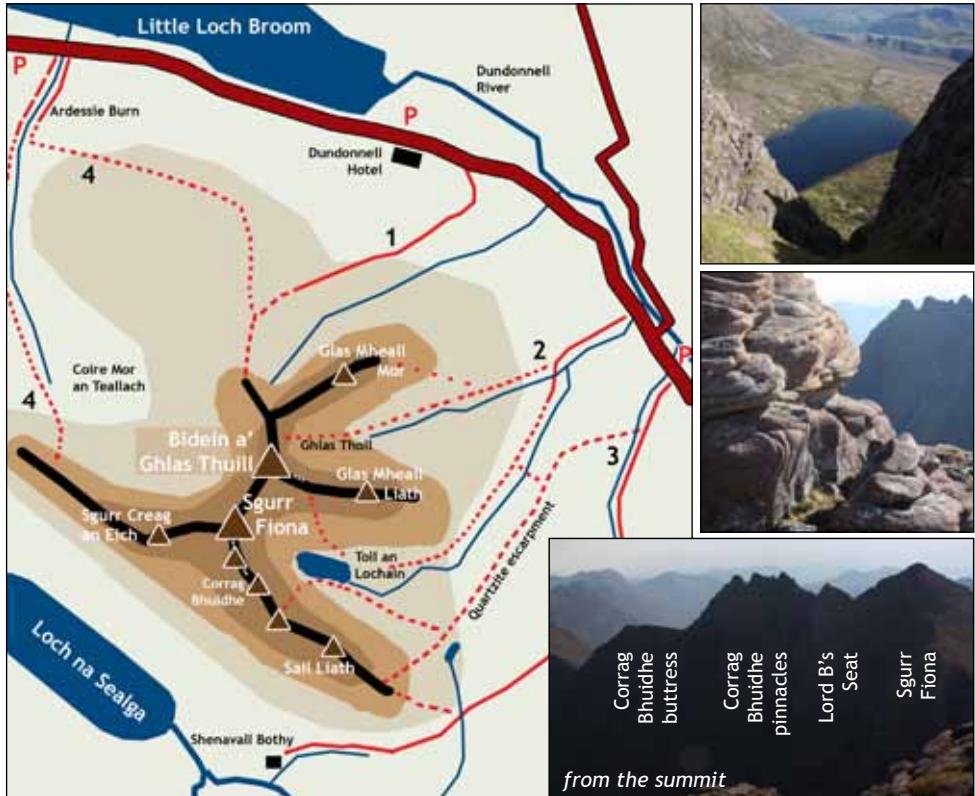
Corrag Bhuidhe pinnacles and Sgurr Fiona



from Sail Liath, summit to the right



from Beinn Dearg Mor, with Loch na Sealga



Routes to/from the hill:

- (1) The easy route to the summit. The path starts 500 metres east of Dundonnell Hotel. In places it divides into many paths, but basically it ascends a slight ridge until at 700m the ground opens out into unusual sandy wind-blown terrain. Head for the col between Glas Mheall Mor and the summit, and up to the top with care but little difficulty.
- (2) The start of this route is unclear through rhododendrons beside a burn, opposite Dundonnell House. It is less popular and rougher than routes 1 and 3, but can be used to reach the corries. Glas Mheall Mor is steep but possible from the east, but GM Liath is not recommended. A steep route can be found up or down the head of Ghlas Tholl.
- (3) From Corriehallie a track leads south, a popular route to Shenvall bothy (the parking space is often full). For An Teallach, it is certainly best to leave the path and follow the smooth top of a remarkable quartzite escarpment (it is a Moine Thrust effect, p35). The eastern slopes of Sail Liath are the usual approach to the main ridge.
- (4) This route is a possible circuit which climbs the two Munros but omits the pinnacles; to make up for this it follows Ardessie Burn whose lower stretch is uniquely wonderful (p3); upstream you cross rough ground to reach the long western spur by climbing up the east side of Sgurr Ruadh. Much of the northern route is over easy plateau ground passing the oddly named Mac is Mathair.

BEINN A' CHLAIDHEIMH SGURR BAN

These two relatively gentle hills, along with their neighbours (*opposite*), form the eastern edge of the Great Wilderness. The Moine Thrust (p35) runs to their east, beyond which the scenery becomes softer and more rounded. The four are often climbed together with A' Mhaighdean and Ruadh Stac Mor (p11,12) to make a very long round from Shenavall bothy, but it is better to devise easier ways of tackling them.

Beinn a' Chlaidheimh had a flat 2750ft summit in the first survey (p11), was promoted to Munro-ship (916m) in 1974, and then re-measured in 2012 and found to be half a metre too low. But it has a pleasantly easy well-defined ridge and is worth climbing whatever its status.

Sgurr Ban is “white” because of its quartzite, a lot of it, which gives difficult walking; but it is possible to avoid much of it to the west on a clear day. The contrast between its quartzite and sandstone screees is striking. It is the least impressive of our hills, but it does have one claim to fame: the extraordinary areas of bare quartzite slabs on its east flank, which may be the biggest such feature in Britain. They are walkable in dry conditions and well worth visiting.

The approach from the north via Achnegie involves a river crossing and a long pull up to Beinn a' Chlaidheimh. Better, from the east a path leads along Loch a' Bhraoin and on to Loch an Nid; then take to the slabs, perhaps bearing left to reach the sandstone side of Sgurr Ban.

Sgurr Ban and Mullach from Beinn Dearg Mor



*ben a khlie-iv, hill of the sword
scoor barn, white peak
913m + 989m, Corbett + Munro
quartzite and sandstone*

Beinn a' Chlaidheimh from Sgurr Ban



Beinn a' Chlaidheimh ridge



Sgurr Ban, with An Teallach beyond



An Teallach silhouetted, from Sgurr Ban

MULLACH COIRE MHIC FHEARCHAIR BEINN TARSUINN

moolakh corra veek errakhar,
hill of Farquhar's son's corrie
ben tar-shin, transverse hill
1018m + 937m, two Munros
sandstone, quartzite, gneiss

Mullach from Beinn Tarsuinn



Sgurr Dubh



Beinn Tarsuinn summit



Beinn Tarsuinn ridge, Beinn Lair beyond



Mullach CMF has the longest Munro name, equal with one other hill (the Farquhar may be the first Earl of Ross, in the 1220s). It is the highest of this foursome, and unique among the high hills in featuring three of the four mountain-building rocks found here. The gneiss is present only thanks to the Moine Thrust (p35). Pinnacled Sgurr Dubh, the jagged south east top, is made of gneiss which has been pushed up from the east and badly shattered in the process; the traverse of it makes a rough scramble on which special care is needed.

A good circuit from Loch an Nid is: Sgurr Ban via its slabs, Mullach CMF, east over its 981m top and on to Sgurr Dubh; then go east for about another 700m before turning down north west to leave the gneiss. Reach the glen via another area of slabs.

Beinn Tarsuinn is “transverse” because it turns away north west from the main ridge, giving it a view of the other hills. It is pure sandstone (a relief after all the quartzite), an easy elegant summit followed by a fine narrow Torridonian crest with easy scrambling and a strange sloping tabletop. Little Meall Garbh, between the two hills, can be avoided by a path on its west side.

As well as the northern and eastern approaches, these two can be reached from Kinlochewe to the south, via Heights of Kinlochewe and the path to Lochan Fada, where there is good camping.

Beinn Tarsuinn scrambling



BEINN DEARG MOR

The two very remote Beinn Deargs sit side by side above Loch na Sealga, and are usually reached by the track along Gruinard River or from Shenavall bothy (which involves two river crossings). Dearg Mor is a spectacular mountain by any standards; from Shenavall it looks like a great bat spreading its wings. It is all Torridonian sandstone. The summit is perched precariously on a fin of rock above Coire nan Clach, with other ridges and crags making a fearsome ensemble.

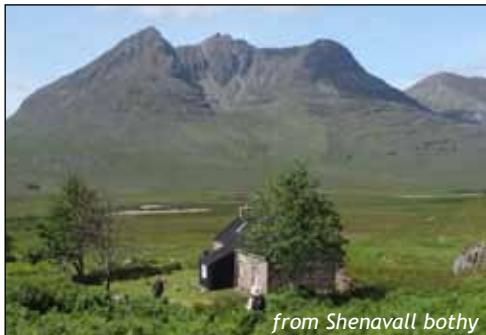
One way to reach its top is from the col which links it to its little sister, and up a rather loose path. A better approach is to climb steeply up to the south east corrie, whose south side is an optional narrow pinnacle ridge which calls for careful scrambling. The corrie itself is a pleasant gentle place with one very odd feature: a deep ravine crosses its mouth and needs to be by-passed at either end; it is the biggest of a series of land-slip cracks. The summit is easily reached from the corrie.



the south east corrie



the ravine



from Shenavall bothy



from the south



the summit cairn

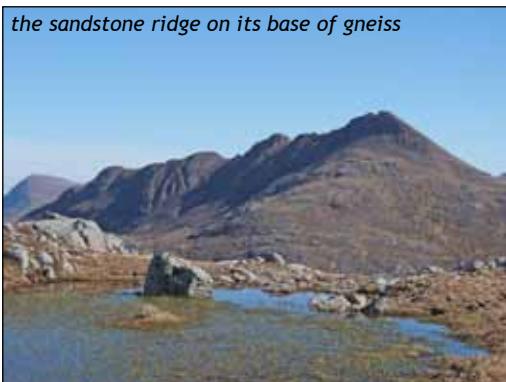


heading down to the corrie, and pinnacle ridge

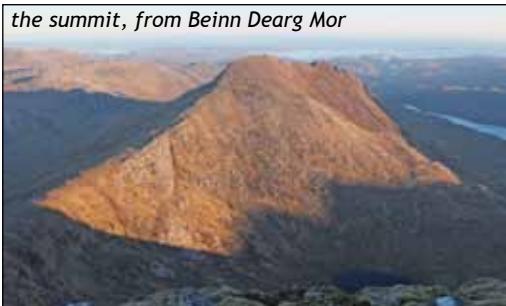
ben jerrag vaik, small red hill
820m, Corbett
sandstone on gneiss

BEINN DEARG BHEAG

the sandstone ridge on its base of gneiss



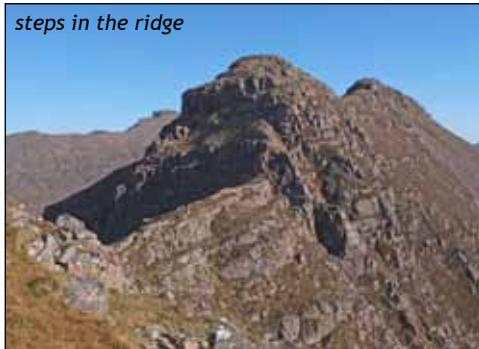
the summit, from Beinn Dearg Mor



the two Deargs from Sail Mhor



steps in the ridge



The lesser Beinn Dearg is simply a ridge 1.5km long, a slice of sandstone perched on a visible base of gneiss. The summit is conveniently placed at the south end, so that it can easily be climbed with its bigger sister from the col between them; this is reached by a steep climb up from Loch Toll an Lochain.

The full traverse starts from the west end of Loch na Sealga or somewhere along its shore. Small gneiss hills lead to the foot of Dearg Bheag, and there you are faced with a very steep vegetated start. Scrabble up this to the ridge, which on the map looks straightforward. It isn't. It starts easily, but then there are several small tops with some quite awkward rocky steps to scramble down and steep drops on each side: it needs careful route selection.

Across the glen to the west is a rarely visited area of gneiss hills and ridges with several lochs which deserves exploration. Lochan na Bearta and Loch Toll a' Mhadaidh are lonely places where you can really feel that you are in a wilderness. The rough ridge north from Creag-mheall Mor is an alternative to the track along Gruinard River if you have plenty of time.

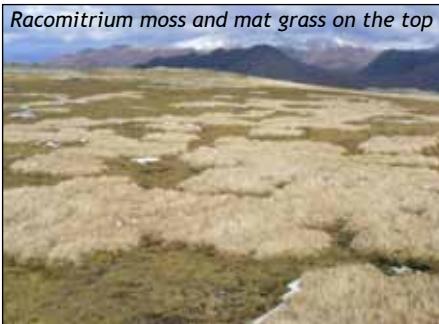


BEINN A' CHAISGEIN MOR

ben a kharsh-kin mor, big forbidding hill
856m, Corbett
gneiss

Chaisgein Mor is one of the two Lewisian gneiss hills in this guide, the other being its neighbour A' Mhaighdean. It is a great lump of a hill, with a broad flat top, unusual in this area. But it is not boring. On its south west side the plateau stops very suddenly, and on this steep face there are two outstanding crags, Carn Mor and Sgurr na Laocainn. The latter is a square-cut tower which stands out in the view from the road at Loch Tollie; the former is less prominent, but famous for its hard rock climbs, some of the best in Britain (Fionn Buttress, Dragon, etc.). Below these crags is the rarely occupied hunting lodge of Carnmore with the open bothy which used to be its stable. It is a very basic bothy, but in a great situation. Across the Dubh Loch from Carnmore is a complex group of high crags, including the ice-smoothed Ghost Slabs.

Chaisgein Mor is easily climbed by the main path which leads over to Shenavall, turning left off it to reach the summit. It's worth visiting the top of Sgurr na Laocainn while you're there. A good circular walk can be made by continuing to **BEINN A' CHAISGEIN BEAG** (682m, a Graham), and then returning to Carnmore by the stalkers' path shown on the map.



RUADH STAC MOR

An island of sandstone in a sea of gneiss, Ruadh Stac Mor was promoted to Munro-ship in 1974 (see *Mapping* below). Its main distinction is that it is the remotest Munro; the OS remotest point in Britain is a mile north, 650m west of Ruadh Stac Beag. It stands out in distant views as a red hill, compared with the grey of its neighbours. In spite of its name, Ruadh Stac Mor is a small hill.

The usual approach needs care: from the col between it and A' Mhaighdean (one of the best places to see how the sandstone was deposited on a gneiss landscape) you climb steep slopes of broken sandstone. The summit ridge is also made of oddly shattered sandstone, but an easy flat-topped ridge leads north from it. This can be descended on either side, but not at the abrupt end.

gneiss col and summit



summit and col from the west slope

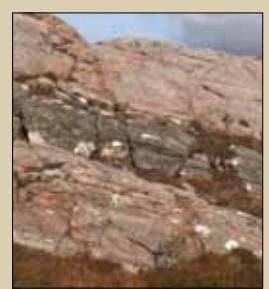


Mapping

The Great Wilderness was first surveyed by the Ordnance Survey in the 1870s, and the first one-inch-to-a-mile map was published in 1882. This used 250ft contours, so it was not very precise. The surveyors seem to have had a particular problem in this area: the landowner (notorious Meyrick Bankes) clearly did not like to have them wandering over his land, and gave them a deadline. Presumably the cloud was low at the time, because four hills on the map stopped short at the 2750ft contour, with flat tops: A' Mhaighdean, Ruadh Stac Mor, Beinn Tarsuinn and Beinn a' Chlaidheimh. In 1968 the last one-inch map gave them another 50 to 100ft, but it took the new survey for the 1:50,000 map to realise their true height: all were made Munros, over 3000ft (since then, Beinn a' Chlaidheimh has been demoted). The OS spelling of Gaelic is not always accurate: e.g. Beinn Dearg Mor should be Beinn Dhearg Mhor.

Lewisian Gneiss (*pronounced nice*)

This rock, the oldest in Western Europe, started 3 billion years ago as granite-like rock; this was then taken deep into the earth's crust and metamorphosed by the pressure and temperature there. The result was a hard rock with its minerals sorted into vertical layers ("foliation"), usually pink or grey but very varied. For the next billion years or more, it underwent more changes, including being split open so that lava could rise to fill the cracks, seen today as dark stripes across the pale rock. By the time the Torridonian sandstone was laid down on top of it, it had been worn down to a remarkably varied landscape of small hills and hollows, with some higher points as in the Carnmore area.



A' MHAIGHDEAN

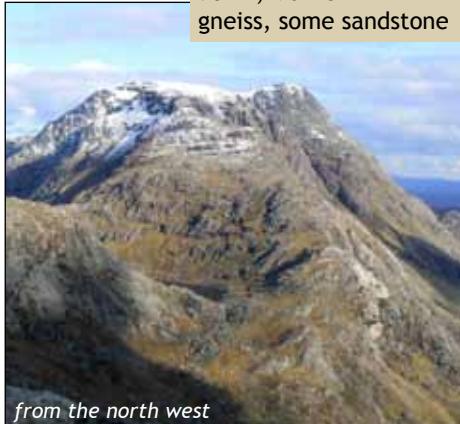
The Maiden could be called the heart of the Great Wilderness. It is often claimed to be the best mountain viewpoint in the country. And it is the highest point to which the oldest rock (Lewisian gneiss) reaches. With such superlatives, it is hard to do it (or should that be her?) justice.

Another title used to be the remotest Munro, but that has probably passed on to the neighbouring peak, Ruadh Stac Mor. The two hills are usually climbed together, and they are certainly a long way from any transport. It is possible to climb them in a very long day from Poolewe, and many make them part of a five-Munro round from Shenavall bothy. But neither of these leaves time to appreciate the Maiden. Ideally, climb it in fine settled weather from Carnmore, or spend a night on the top.

There is only one way to climb it: up the north west ridge. The south east side is easier, but this ridge is not to be missed! From Carnmore take the path which climbs across the slope below Sgurr na Laocainn. At the end of the crags, leave the path, cross a burn and contour across to the start of the ridge. Climb it slowly, enjoying small optional scrambles, but above all watching the views develop. Lochs cradled in rocky hollows. Impressive crags in all directions. The emerging complexity of the Gorm Loch Beag area to your right. Distant views opening up to the Deargs and An Teallach. The buttressed wall of Beinn Lair fronted by Gorm Loch Mor and the strange little ridge of Beinn Tharsuinn Chaol. The view along Dubh Loch and Fionn Loch to lochan-studded moorlands and the sea. So many “wow” moments!

The gneiss tends to form small grey knolls, so it is a surprise to suddenly find the ridge changing to red rock, and difficult pinnacles barring the way: a survivor from the miles-deep sandstone which once covered all the gneiss. The pinnacles can be edged round, and at one point a small exposed but easy gully is used. Most of the summit area is flat and sandy, but the summit itself is a tower of gneiss, perfectly positioned at the edge of a 550m drop to Gorm Loch Mor.

a vai-tchin, the maiden
967m, Munro
gneiss, some sandstone



from the north west



sandstone on the ridge

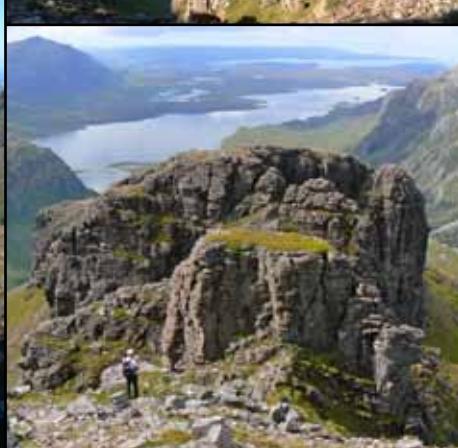


the summit



the summit from the south

Views from A' Mhaighdean and its north west ridge



BEINN AIRIGH CHARR

This distinctively-shaped hill seems to crouch above Poolewe, but is actually 9km away. It is the north west section of the great ridge of amphibolite (Loch Maree Group rock, p19) which stretches for 11km to the east end of Beinn Lair, sloping down on the Loch Maree side but precipitous to the north. It is a complex and beautiful hill, well worth exploring on a fine leisurely day, or overnighting on.

Access is by the small private road from Poolewe to Inveran, an optional short-cut rough footpath from just beyond Loch an Doire Ghairbh to join the track from Kernsary to Ardlair, then a stalkers' path (an ugly track at its start). A bicycle makes this long approach easier. The path goes east via a beautiful miniature canyon to reach the broad north west corrie of the hill. Follow the corrie or the rocky ridge on either side to the summit area. The top is above a strangely soft slope (semipelite rock, formerly sediment, p19) which can be avoided. The view into the heart of the Great Wilderness is extraordinary. To the north, a short ridge leads to Martha's Peak which overlooks the huge north face and stands out in distant views. (Martha was a goat-herd who dropped her staff down the cliff and ... you can guess the rest). The whole square kilometre of the summit area is a lovely place to wander: smooth swards, rock outcrops, scree, rich with alpine flora.

A worthwhile longer descent route is south east to the pass Srathan Buidhe (on the old droving route from Poolewe) where a good path takes you round the hill under the impressive crags and boulder field of the north face and finally back through a plantation by a poor track to Kernsary.



BEINN LAIR

ben lar, hill of the mare
859m, Corbett
amphibolite

Beinn Lair is a hill of extreme contrasts. Seen across Loch Maree it gives the illusion of being a featureless mound. But its north face is what Sir Hugh Munro described as “possibly the grandest inland line of cliffs to be found in Scotland”, nearly 5km of buttresses and gullies up to 400m high.

The approach is long, unless you can cross Loch Maree. Round each end of the hill there is a good path; the western one is the usual approach, from Fionn Loch to the Bealach Mheinnidh, a strange place, peppered with small crags. From there follow the edge of the cliffs. Not far up you may notice a very odd feature: white elongated lozenges bubbling up through the amphibolite, made of a rock called anorthosite. Take time to admire the views to the north, and the changing spectacular cliff scenery below you, unusually visible because it forms protruding buttresses. Beyond the broad summit the cliffs are rarely visited and more complex: an area worth exploring. From the south east you can use the paths to traverse the hill via Letterewe on Loch Maree, but it makes a very long day; a night on the hill is the best way to appreciate it.

From the Bealach Mheinnidh you can also climb **MEALL MHEINNIDH** (722m, a Graham): a neglected but fine rugged hill, with more anorthosite on the very top.



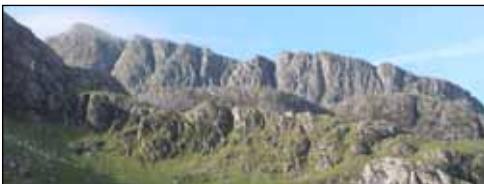
slopes above Loch Maree



anorthosite



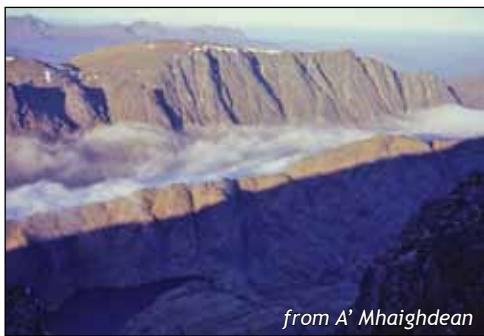
cliffs of Lair, Mheinnidh and Airigh Charr



from near Carnmore



above Gleann Tulacha



from A' Mhaighdean

SLIOCH

*slee-ohk, spear
981m, Munro
sandstone*

Slioch is the much photographed castle which towers over Loch Maree and helps to make it the most beautiful loch in the Highlands. There is more to the hill than meets the eye: it is not just a cliff-girt monolithic tower, but a C shape around a wide corrie (Coire na Sleaghach) which is the only real weakness in its defences.

Unless you have a boat or like wading rivers, you have to walk 3 miles from the car park at Incheril before starting the ascent (and, wearyly, back afterwards). Beyond the Bianasdail burn footbridge, various informal paths head uphill across wet ground. The hill path then climbs to the col between Sgurr Dubh and Meall Each; it is badly eroded and rough. Continue into the corrie, a lovely place to wander, perhaps disturbing deer and goats. There are four routes to the summit from here. (1) The usual route: up the corrie on the left a path leads back left up to a beautifully situated pair of high lochans, and then traverses a steep slope to the top. (2) The burn (though sometimes underground) can be followed delightfully to the top of the corrie; continue up grass and moss to the summit. (3) Straight up steep Sgurr Dubh to the left. (4) Straight ahead up the eastern spur, Sgurr an Tuill Bhain, which is joined to the summit by a fine narrow ridge. The roof of the castle is unexpectedly spacious, a nice place to camp. The actual top is not the trig point, but another bump further to the north.



the massif from Beinn a' Mhuinidh



Kinlochewe and Loch Maree



in the corrie

sunrise over Slioch



BEINN A' MHUINIDH



terrain south of the summit



Coire Each



cliffs north of the summit



This neglected hill is more interesting than it looks, for geological reasons. It is in effect upside down. The summit is gneiss, the oldest rock; below it is younger sandstone, and below that is the youngest rock, quartzite. How did it get like that? The answer is the Moine Thrust, or rather series of thrusts (p35), which pushed huge slices of rock out of place.

The whole massif is a 6km-long diamond shape, surrounded by glaciated glens, sloping down to the north east; the summit is at its left corner, defended by cliffs to the west. The path from the car park at Incheril to Loch Maree gives access to three possible routes, all of which are hard work, and more difficult when the bracken is up (take a machete!).

- (1) Up to the left of the burn Allt Chnaimhean, avoiding the ravine; then over Meallan Ghobhar (goat hill).
- (2) An adventurous and recommended route starts about 1km beyond the burn: climb up to a long intermittent often pale rising cliff (it includes a "wave" similar to but smaller than the one on p25) and follow the foot of it to the left.
- (3) In another 1km there is another burn with a 100m waterfall which can be seen from the road (often almost empty) and which gives the hill its name (!); it is possible but strenuous to climb up a gully to the right of this.

The best feature of the hill-top is a green fertile sloping shelf called Coire Each, north of the waterfall, easily reached by

any of the routes; at its top there is a fine view across to Slioch and down to Glen Bianasdail. The summit is above this in a complicated area of shattered gneiss. The least difficult descent is south east, linking numerous lochans, to the brackened slopes down to the track along the Abhainn Bruachaig. Look out for goats.

The Gairloch Minis

The A832 main road and Loch Maree enclose an area of about 36 sq km, immediately east of Gairloch. This area is roadless and almost pathless, and sprinkled with hills and lochans: classic glaciated “cnoc and lochan” country, and rough walking. It is a great resource for a day when the bigger hills are too wet, clouded or windy, but also well worth exploring for its own sake. (There are other roadside areas of small gneiss hills at Gruinard, north and south of Gair Loch and at Diabaig, but this is the best.)

The geology is important in this remarkably rocky landscape. In the eastern two-thirds the hills are made of 3 billion-year-old Lewisian gneiss (*p11*), remarkably varied; in the western third they are grey-green 2 billion-year-old amphibolite (*p19*). Both of these metamorphic rocks are vertically layered (foliated), which means that on sloping rock there is no shortage of footholds: it is wonderful terrain for rock-scrambling.

The area contains 10 hills which are over 300m with a 50m drop all round them, here nicknamed the “Gairloch Minis”. Here is the table of these miniature Munros:

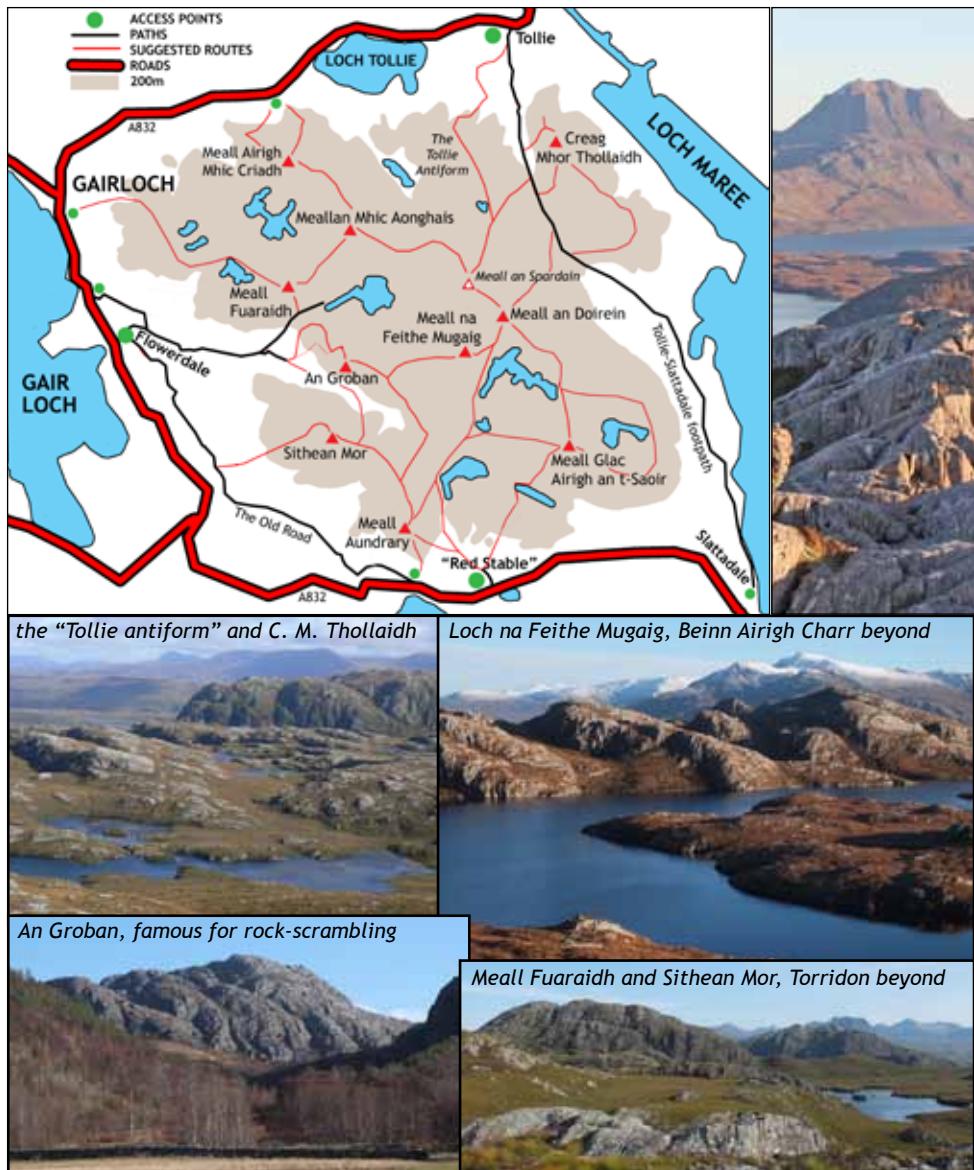
Hills (in order of height)	Map ref	Height	Drop	Rock
1 Meall an Doirein	858 754	420m	100	gneiss
1a Meall an Spardain ¹	854 758	415m	43	gneiss
2 Sithean Mor	836 740	384m	150	amphibolite
3 An Groban	838 749	383m	88	amphibolite
4 Meall Glac Airigh an t-Saoir	864 739	c390m	70	gneiss
5 Meall Fuaraidh	832 758	369m	100	amphibolite
6 Meall na Feithe Mugaig ²	852 749	369m	56	gneiss
7 Meallan Mhic Aonghais	839 765	367m	100	gneiss
8 Meall Airigh Mhic Criadh	831 773	349m	85	gneiss
9 Creag Mhor Thollaidh	864 776	343m	100	gneiss
10 Meall Aundrary	846 728	327m	110	amphibolite

Note 1: this hill is worth including, although the drop is not sufficient: a subsidiary top.

Note 2: unnamed on the OS maps; the name is taken from the loch below it.

It would no doubt be possible for a very fit and footsure Mini-bagger to visit all ten in a day (probably a circuit from Tollie), but three days is more reasonable and four or five even better. Any normal walker will average one map mile per hour here: straight lines are rarely possible; there are many distractions in the form of attractively rocky routes and fascinating gneiss; the hollows between the rocky bits are sometimes filled with bog, tussocky ground or water; grazing animals are mostly excluded so that the vegetation can be thick at lower levels; wildlife, geology and photography give plenty of excuses for a pause. The rock-and-bog terrain is surprisingly beautiful, but it is so complex that navigation is best based on the lochs and lochans rather than the hills.

A health and safety warning: in places the ground is pockmarked with holes. In 2002-7, 2½ million trees (pine, birch, rowan, alder etc.) were planted here. The vision was to produce a huge forest where wildlife would flourish; it was the biggest such scheme in Scotland. But the ground is unsuitable for trees, and above 200m the planting has failed.



Loch Maree Group rocks

The rocks east of Gairloch and north of Loch Maree were formed 2 billion years ago in an ancient ocean. They were then incorporated into the Lewisian gneiss and metamorphosed. The main hill-forming rock comes from the basalt which formed the sea bottom: **amphibolite**, grey to dark green, vertically layered (seen in the lower two pictures above). Others include the softer sedimentary rocks which covered the basalt including mudstone and limestone (now semipelitic, marble, etc.), and mineral deposits from sub-sea hot springs. They are much studied, informing us about ancient seas with early (bacterial) life. The Gairloch and Loch Maree sections are off-set because of the 14km movement on the Loch Maree fault (without this, Slioch would overlook Poolewe!).

Mindful Hill-Walking

For more than a hundred years hill-walking has been a popular Scottish sport, with good reason: our hills are human-scaled – not too big, too many, too difficult or too inaccessible – making Scotland probably the best place in the world for the activity.

When Sir Hugh Munro produced his famous Tables in 1891, his aim was simply to find out how many mountains there are in Scotland; he chose to define a mountain as being at least 3000 feet high (914.4 metres), and he was surprised to find that there are so many (currently 282). Climbing all these “Munros” is an achievable target and gives great pleasure, but there is a well-known danger that it can turn into mere summit-bagging. Hills must have summits, of course, and these are tempting: they are great viewpoints, they are the only natural fixed points in the landscape, they seem to define the hills. But most walkers realise that a hill is much more than its summit, and to them the following thoughts will no doubt be obvious!

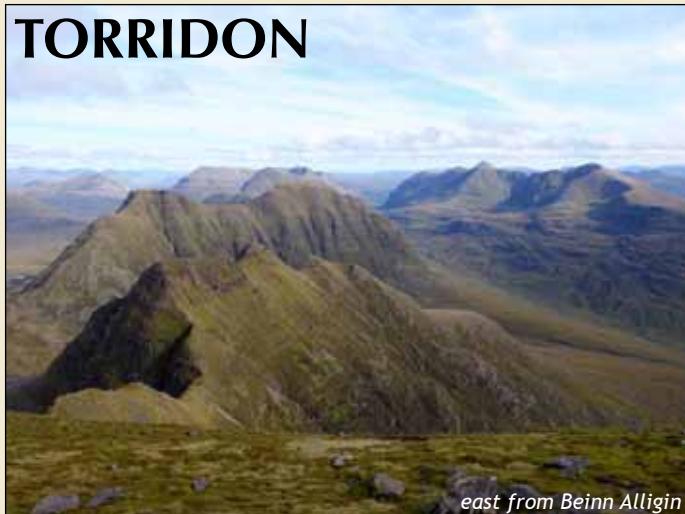
Most of the pleasure in hill-walking is found in the journey, not in the destination. This may be a cliché, but it is still true: when a walker plods head-down to reach the top, perhaps talking all the way (family gossip, putting the world to rights, etc.) or obsessed by thoughts (deep or shallow) or concentrating on electronic devices, the walk has lost most of its value. Mindful hill-walking means noticing, focusing on what is underfoot and around: flora, fauna, views, land forms, rock... Here are some examples of how the walk can be enlivened (add a pinch of salt to taste):

- watch the changes in plants as you climb through wet moorland and dry slopes to the summit area (mosses, lichens, grasses, flowers), with dwarf arctic or alpine varieties at the top; learn some of their names so that you can greet them as old friends.
- look for signs of animals and birds (paths, droppings, sitting places); watch for movement (eagle or buzzard or raven? deer or goat?); carry binoculars and stop to use them.
- learn to identify and love the main rock types; wonder at the extraordinary variety in the gneiss (layers, folds, colours, textures); enjoy the feel of different rocks underfoot.
- notice the amazing work done by the ice ages and speculate on how it was achieved (corries, glens, ridges, cliffs, moraines).
- enjoy the developing view, and the wildness of places where nature alone rules.
- admire the clouds; be on the hill early and late (with the right equipment) to watch sunset and sunrise; appreciate weather of all kinds.
- be aware of beauty everywhere and in everything; deep thoughts may be reasonable here – what is beauty? does it lie in proportion, in colour, in form? If you have the good fortune to believe in the creator God, then you will explain it as his touch revealed in creation and be thankful.

Keep mind and eyes open. Notice the unusual and stop to examine it. Don't hurry, halt often, divert often.

Turn off your phone. Put away your watch. Listen to the silence. Take a camera and keep it handy, but don't let it rule you: look first then record, mostly the places not the people. Enjoy the summit, but also enrich the whole walk by looking and seeing.

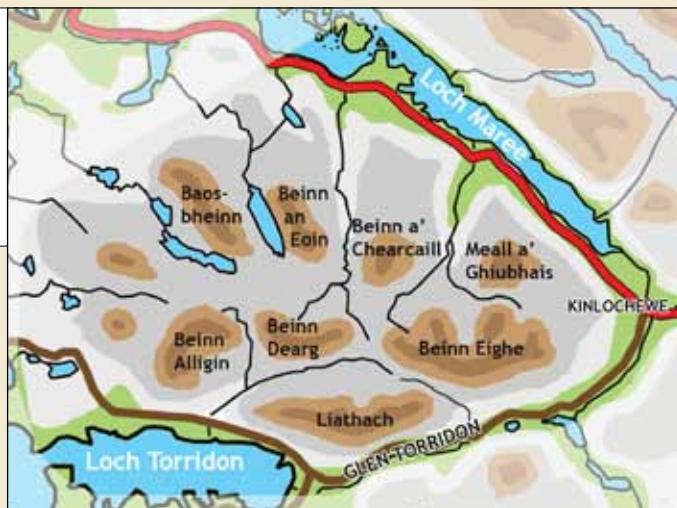
TORRIDON



The famous Torridon range, named after the sea loch, is a paradise for hill-lovers, and a masterpiece of ice sculpture. Following fault lines and old river courses, the glaciers have carved out a varied collection of steep isolated mountains, narrow-crested and deeply-corried. They seem to have been especially designed for hill-walkers and photographers.

Baobhheinn	p 22
Beinn an Eoin	p 23
Beinn a' Chearcaill	p 24
Meall a' Ghiubhais	p 25
Beinn Eighe	p 26
Liathach	p 28
Beinn Alligin	p 30
Beinn Dearg	p 32

Eponymous Torridonian sandstone, which also forms the remarkable hills of Coigach and Assynt, here reaches its climax. The two biggest hills also have a capping of white Cambrian quartzite. Underneath them all is a solid foundation of Lewisian gneiss.

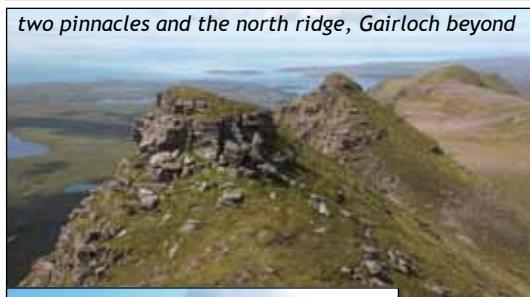


BAOSBHEINN

Baosbheinn is the nearest big hill to Gairloch, a prominent 5km long ridge reaching out from the Torridons towards the north west; its distinctive shape is recognisable from Skye and the Outer Hebrides. Its south west side is steep and craggy, the north east a series of shallow corries. The two most obvious features are the high summit with its two small pinnacles, and the north west face which is seen from Gairloch; at the foot of this is the biggest "Pro-Talus Rampart" in Britain, formed from large boulders which tumbled down ice to make a 50m high barricade: worth visiting.

The walk starts at the "Red Stable" (a green shed). An eroded track leads in 7km to Loch na h-Oidhche. On the way a river is crossed on stepping stones. Just upstream here you can see that this river splits off from another river: it is an artificial diversion, probably made to reduce flooding down in Kerrysdale. Before the loch, turn right, cross the river where possible, climb easy slopes into the shallow corrie north of the summit, and up to the flat top. If you want to reach the north ridge from here, take care: the pinnacled summit ridge ends in a high vertical cliff. A small path well below this ridge traverses steep ground to the flat-topped north ridge, which gives enjoyable high-level walking to its very end. You can descend to the right from here if you like steep ground and rough walking, but back 1km and then east is easier.

The long but very worthwhile full traverse of Baosbheinn's four tops takes you to the south end of the loch, then on past the small private bothy Poca Buidhe. Here you are in the lonely heart of the Torridons.



BEINN AN EOIN

Beinn an Eoin lies parallel to Baosbheinn on the other side of Loch na h-Oidhche (loch of the night). It has a much simpler lay-out: a broad ridge with a climb up to a short summit ridge at its south end. From the side it looks rather uninteresting, but end-on it appears to be a sharp pyramid.

The usual ascent leaves the track soon after the stepping stones (see opposite) and heads for the left corner of the hill, where there are some fine sandstone slabs half way up; from these the ridge is easily reached. Take time to explore and admire the sandstone on the way up and along. The summit pyramid looks daunting, but turns out to be quite an easy climb; then a short narrow delightful ridge leads to the top and fine views of the other Torridons.

The south end of the hill is steep and easier to ascend than to descend, with many crags to avoid (invisible from above). At its foot there is some good rock and loch scenery to explore.

Torridonian Sandstone

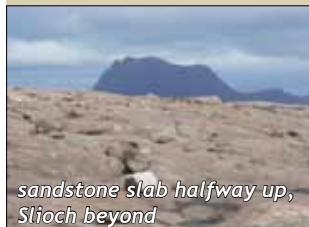
This beautiful rock is the biggest sandstone formation in Britain, and also the oldest. It was laid down miles thick in two stages: 1200 and 1000 million years ago. It is composed of quartz (both grains and cement) and feldspar whose iron gives it the reddish colour. The rock from which the mountains are made is from the second group, and is called the Applecross Formation: coarse, pebbly, often forming slabs and terraces, its layers often distorted, highly jointed (cracked into blocks), great to walk on (not slippery when wet) and to scramble on. The three examples below are from Beinn an Eoin. **Warning:** because of the terracing, when you look down a Torridonian slope, you may see only grass (or snow); looking up, you may see only rock. Don't be misled!



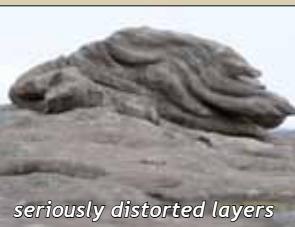
*Baosbheinn and Beinn an Eoin
with Loch na h-Oidhche between,
from Beinn Dearg*



*looking back along the ridge
from the south west*



*sandstone slab halfway up,
Slioch beyond*



seriously distorted layers



very jointed, falling apart

ben a kher-kil, hill of the circle
725m, Graham
sandstone

BEINN A' CHEARCAILL

Beinn a' Chearcaill is an unusual hill. It is a rising wedge of ground filling the space between two glens, Strath Lungard/Talladale and Glen Grudie, much of it "circled" by cliffs. The summit is at its apex and is unique, a huge flat slab of sandstone, perfectly sited to give grand views of the higher Torridon hills. At only 725m it may seem insignificant, but it is a hill to enjoy and take time over: a delight to wander at will around it on a fine sunny day, linking its lochans and pools, exploring its plentiful outcropping rock and its boulder fields. And why not spend a fine night on its summit (with a mattress)?

Park on a short section of old road. Climbing the slopes above Loch Maree is not recommended: rough, craggy, with deep heather. Instead use the narrow footpath which parallels the River Grudie (not the new hydro track). Possible routes on and off the hill are: the slopes about 1km along the path (rough); a small cairned route across the north slopes of Coire Briste to its head (easy); a scramble up the south side of this corrie (best); follow a burn up from just beyond the remote end of the footpath (steep). Lovely sandstone everywhere, perhaps at its best south of the corrie, climbing up to a top; the summit is reached from here via a col with a lochan. A' Choineach Beag is also worth visiting.



Coire Briste and Slioch



sandstone terrain



Meall a' Ghiubhais from the summit slab

below: from the summit, Beinn Eige with Coire mhic Fhearchair and part of Liathach, evening



mi-owl a yoo-ish, hill of the pine tree
887m, Corbett
sandstone on quartzite

MEALL A' GHIUBHAIS

Thanks to the Nature Reserve Mountain Trail, this is one of the easiest hills, though still strenuous. The remarkable Alpine-style trail path takes you from Loch Maree up to 550m, climbing mostly on white quartzite (p27). Above it, Meall a' Ghiubhais (also spelt Ghiuthais) is rather ordinary, but it has special geological interest: its top is sandstone, pushed over the younger quartzite below it.

The easiest ascent leaves the path soon after the biggest lochan and makes a rising traverse left across the hillside to reach a small burn in a shallow gully; then climb straight up to the top. A longer and more attractive descent is to go north west from the ridge between the two tops, then bear right round below the north east face to pick up the downward path. It's a complicated area, a navigational challenge.

the white wave cliff, with sandstone above



Loch Bhanamhoir



cracked sandstone ...



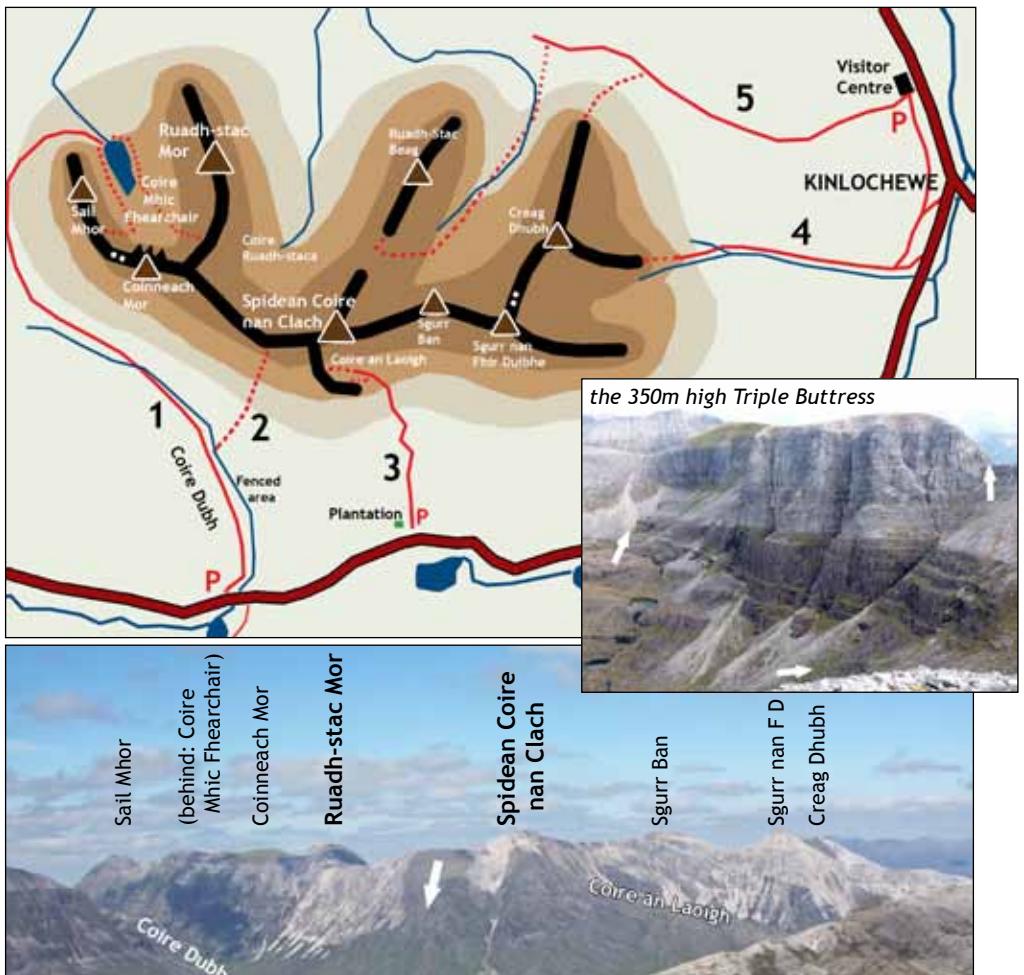
... and ex-sandstone



the hill from the top of the trail

A quite different and much more interesting walk shows off the geology and scenery: this is the **CIRCUIT** of the hill. From the lochans traverse below the hill to hit the burn at about 500m. Cross the southern slope, dropping down to avoid screes. You will pass well vegetated patches with outcrops of a strange brown rock: Fucoid Beds, a kind of limestone. When you can, ascend below cliffs to Druim Grudaidh. This is a wonderful area: slabs of quartzite and "pipe rock" (with fossil "worm" casts) and, above, a remarkable wave-shaped white cliff. The summit sandstone was pushed into place by the Moine Thrust, shoving the quartzite ahead of it like a bulldozer. Study any sandstone you see on this walk: much of it has been damaged by the strain, with thin quartz-filled cracks. Continue to lovely Loch Bhanamhoir, in a delightful but rarely visited area with unusually easy walking. It's worth climbing a very small hill at 976 649: on its top the sandstone has been so altered by the thrust that it has been metamorphosed into a very different striped rock called mylonite. From here wend south east through a sandstone maze to find the path. On the descent path, where the rock has steps cut into it, it is also mylonite: trace how it merges into the sandstone.

BEINN EIGHE



Beinn Eighe is one of the two giants of Torridon, a whole range of ridges and tops, with a rather un-British and forbidding appearance because of the sheets of pale scree which cover much of it: quartzite, a rock which is good to look at but not to walk on.

Beinn Eighe gives its name to the first National Nature Reserve in Britain, set up in 1951. Its other main claim to fame is the magnificent corrie at its west end, **Coire Mhic Fhearchair** (*corra veek errakhar*), with its mighty Triple Buttress: a very popular walk in itself with good reason. East of it, **Ruadh-stac Mor** is the main summit, out on its own ridge: the least interesting part of the hill. **Spidean Coire nan Clach** is the better but lower Munro. There are not many feasible routes up Beinn Eighe thanks to its quartzite protection. Most climbers go for the two Munros, and the outlying tops are less trodden; but it is possible to walk it all in a day if transport allows – a very rewarding expedition. It is mostly on quartzite, but the walking on the ridge is not as awkward as expected.

RUADH-STAC BEAG (896m, a Corbett) is separate, reached from its southern col.

ben ai, file hill
1010m + 993mm, two Munros
quartzite, a little sandstone

Access Routes (*numbers on map, arrows on pictures*)

(1) A good path leads to Coire MF. A circuit of the loch is worthwhile (easier on the left) getting up close to the hugely impressive cliffs. Beyond the loch is wreckage from a Lancaster bomber which crashed in 1951. The ridge is usually reached by an unpleasantly loose scree route up the back left of the corrie (*arrow, left*); halfway up it's better to scramble with care up the rock on the right. A better route if you like views and scrambling is an easy climb up to the Sail Mhor col (*arrow, bottom*). Go out to the top and back, then on via some rough quartzite to the bad step (*arrow, right*): daunting but a fine airy scramble if you start round to the right and up a small gully. Flat mossy Coinneach Mor is a good campsite.

(2) A steep, long but not difficult descent route, using a grassy band of imbricated sandstone (*arrow*); don't try descending on quartzite!

(3) From a car park at the start a good path leads to the small Coire an Laoigh. Above, the route is highly eroded: better to scramble up the left ridge, with one awkward step. Spidean, the second Munro, is easily reached.

(4) A scenic path, tricky at the burn crossing. From Creag Dhubh the ridge left leads to the "Black Men" pinnacles: rough scrambling on quartzite, easier north to south. The ridge right gives an ankle-twisting descent on big scree.

(5) The "Pony Track" from the National Nature Reserve Visitor Centre: useful access to the north of the hill.

Spidean Coire nan Clach from Coinneach Mor



eastern tops



the classic view from Kinlochewe



Cambrian Quartzite

This grey-white rock started as a beach and shallows on the western shore of the Iapetus Ocean, 540 million years ago. It is almost all made of quartz sand; other less tough minerals were washed out. It is a hard smooth angular sandstone which readily splits into blocks and scree, awkward to walk on and slippery when wet. The upper layers are "Pipe Rock", full of the fossil "worm-casts" of unknown early marine creatures.

The Triple Buttress is made of quartzite on a sandstone base, which is normal (*right, upper*). But because of the Moine Thrust (p35), the two rocks alternate on the rest of Beinn Eige (*right, lower*). What started as two layers has been compressed by the bulldozing force of the thrust so that it has cracked and splintered into vertical leaves; this is called "imbrication".



LIATHACH

Liathach is the finest mountain in Britain. (That's a controversial statement, of course! – many hill-goers prefer An Teallach, p4.) Its unmistakable profile hits you as you turn a certain corner on the Glen Torridon road, and then you drive directly beneath its kilometre-high terraced slopes. Its hidden north side is even more formidable, and its ridge makes a wonderful traverse, unsurpassed for both scenery and enjoyment. It belongs to the National Trust for Scotland.

Don't under-estimate Liathach. Poucher in his pioneering guide to the Scottish Hills called it "the mightiest and most imposing in all Britain". W.H. Murray, when he was about to climb it in winter, met a local stalker who said, "Man, but there iss no other mountain like her in the whole of Scotland! She iss machestic!" When Murray told him of his planned climb, he was outraged: "She iss not to be tampered with!" (*See front cover.*) But in summer, with fine dry weather, those who are fit and sure-footed, enjoy rock scrambling and don't suffer from serious vertigo will have a memorable day. The standard route is the best. The start is tough, an 800m unremitting climb to the ridge. Go out to **Stuc a' Choire Dhuibh Bhig**, the eastern top, for a superb view of the summit. A walk with a little hands-on work, along to and over the two tops of **Stob a' Choire Liath Mhor** (aka Bidein Toll a' Mhuic) with views down into the impressively corried north face and some broken quartzite to negotiate. A climb up the shapely pyramid of **Spidean a' Choire Leith**, the summit, also quartzite but in big blocks at the top. A long lunch stop to admire the views, especially the great **Coire na Caime** below and the Mullach beyond, and to worry about the pinnacles ahead. A careful descent south then south west (tricky navigation in mist) to the start of the nearly 500 metres of **Am Fasarinen** pinnacles.

There are three choices here. (1) Stick to the ridge, with the most exposed/exciting move at the very start. (2) Bypass the first rock and join the ridge just beyond it. (3) Avoid the pinnacles altogether on a small traverse path down to the left: but be warned – this follows scarily narrow ledges. If you can, enjoy the pinnacles: classic sandstone scrambling. All too soon you will reach the easy grassy final ridge up to **Mullach an Rathain**, the second Munro; deviate from the trodden path in places as you follow the sharp cliff edge to the top. The Mullach is a grand peak and great viewpoint, poised above the rock-climbers' Northern Pinnacles; these link to impregnable-looking **Meall Dearg** (hint: corrie and col). Admire the sea and corrie views. Then continue down the ridge a short way to find the descent path into the corrie Toll Ban to the left; this path may have been repaired, or may be dangerously loose at the top – find small paths over to the right if necessary. The distance down to the road seems much longer than expected, but you will reach it eventually – and then probably have to walk 2.5 km along the road to your car.

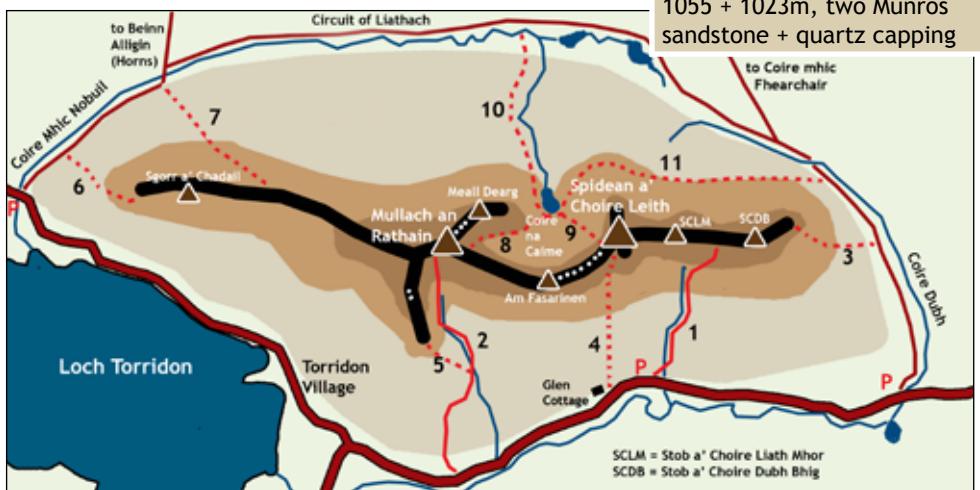
the summit ridge from the east end



Am Fasarinen pinnacle ridge in evening light

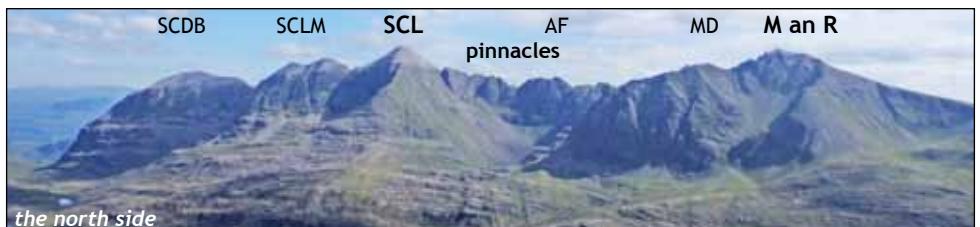


leea-hakh/lee-akh, the grey one
 1055 + 1023m, two Munros
 sandstone + quartz capping



Routes

- 1 The standard and best ascent route: burn, corrie, traverse right: mostly a good path.
- 2 The standard descent route; the path may be eroded at the top but avoidable to the west.
- 3 The harder east end, avoiding crags, with a gully or a tricky scramble to reach the ridge.
- 4 Possible route up the small burn above Glen Cottage (+ fences): 1 vertical km, not recommended!
- 5 South ridge of the Mullach, good scrambling and great views; a difficult bad step near the top.
- 6 Direct ascent of the west end with a steep step at the top; this end is not often visited.
- 7 Relatively straightforward slopes up to the broad west ridge, an easy approach to the Mullach.
- 8 A steep earthy gully or two east of the Mullach, usually possible up to the ridge with great care.
- 9 An impressive gully between summit and pinnacles: easier than it looks.
- 10 Direct route to Coire na Caime: a beautiful place, well worth exploring (and camping in).
- 11 Traverse route to the corrie, needs careful route-finding; use slabs where possible.



the north side



the start of the pinnacles



Mullach an Rathain across Coire na Caime

BEINN ALLIGIN

Where Liathach is formidable, Alligin is friendly: a truly beautiful sandstone mountain whose traverse is a delight. Only climb it in fine weather: its views of sea and loch and hills, and of itself, are not to be missed, and you will want to take your time over its ridges and rocks. Like Liathach, it belongs to the National Trust for Scotland.

Clockwise or anti-clockwise: that is the question. The answer is both, but for a first ascent perhaps anti-clockwise is better: it gives you more chances of rock-scrambling and an easier descent at the end of the day. It is a hill in three parts: Tom na Gruagaich, the southern Munro which looms over Loch Torridon; Sgurr Mor, the summit; and the Horns, a three-pinnacle ridge.

Tom na Gruagaich. A good path starts in trees just opposite the very midgy car park and leads to the top via the great shady corrie scooped out of the east face, Coire nan Laogh, with a burn running down it (useful for refreshment); or scramble steeply up the corrie's left ridge with fine views, to reach the summit area of sand and stones. The top is poised above a 500m drop. From here the ridge drops steeply and rockily to the north (optional scrambling), needing care in descent, then wanders scenically round the rim of the wide corrie Toll a' Mhadaidh Mor.

Sgurr Mor, the main summit. Eroded sandy stony paths lead to the top from east and west. Apart from the outstanding summit view, the most obvious feature is the great gash (Eag Dhubh) which you come upon suddenly (beware in descent). It is worth following the cliff edge up to its lower side. About 4000 years ago,



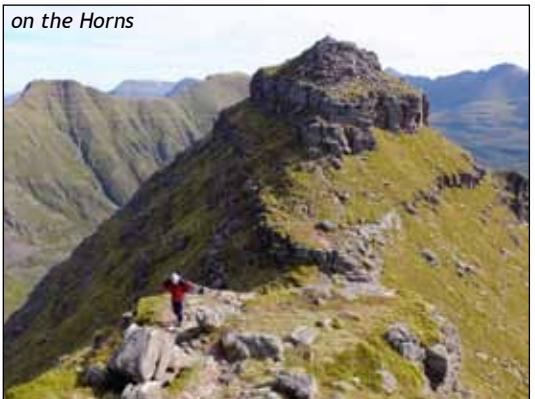
Tom na Gruagaich, Sgurr Mor, the Horns



Sgurr Mor, the summit



Eag Dhubh



on the Horns

on the Horns



Tom na Gruagaich north ridge



the great rockfall



Sgurr Mor and the Horns



*ben aligin, beauty/jewel hill
986m + 922m, two Munros
sandstone*

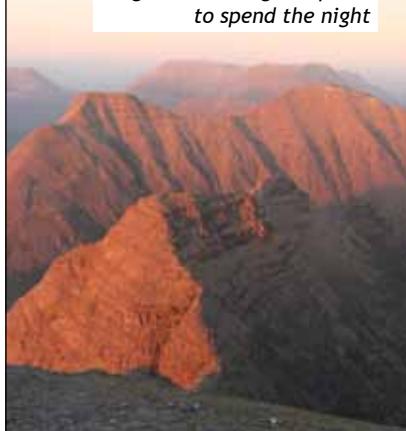
nine million tons of rock broke loose (weakened by faults and perhaps set off by an earthquake) and tumbled into the corrie below, somehow spreading for over 1km; it is the biggest rockfall in Britain, and well worth visiting from below though dangerous to enter.

The Horns. From the south east the remarkable made path up to the Horns is in places a steep scramble. The three Horns give enjoyable scrambling, often with a choice of easier or harder routes, in a spectacular situation: a good introduction to Torridonian rock ridges. There is a precarious avoiding traverse path below them.

The east side of Alligin is mostly cliffs, but some of the west side is gentler and can be walked down. If you don't want to tackle the Horns, a good but lengthy alternative is to descend from the west of Sgurr Mor and circle the foot of the hill clockwise, past Loch Toll nam Biast and on to the glen between Alligin and Dearg. This needs careful route-finding, but there is interesting rock scenery, and the cliffs above are very impressive.

AN RUADH-MHEALLAN (671m, a Graham) is a fine small hill to the west, reached from the Diabaig road.

*the Horns and Beinn Dearg:
Sgurr Mor is a great place
to spend the night*



BEINN DEARG

Beinn Dearg is the most difficult of the Torridon summits to reach. It misses being a Munro by about a metre, so it doesn't have a clearly trodden route up it. And it is *steep*. And the easiest way to the top involves a Bad Step. But it is a very fine hill, neatly positioned in the centre of the Torridons.

It can be approached from the Glen Torridon car park and the Coire Dubh path, or from the Alligin car park and the Coire Mhic Nobuil path (p29). The former gives the easiest route onto the ridge, up to Carn na Feola or a traverse to its left – but then you are faced with the scary-looking pinnacle on the way to the summit; it is not nearly as hard as it looks, an enjoyable staircase to scramble up (avoidance on ledges to the left is scarier!). The Alligin approach leads to the north ridge, which involves a long very steep climb (with a small path in places) to Stuc Loch na Cabhaig, and then an excellent ridge to the summit. The views are brilliant.

An interesting alternative route down is a rough descent to the northern hanging corrie (An Coire Mor) and its loch, then along the outlet burn (don't be tempted to cut the corner) down to the moorland, and a circuit of either end of the hill.



COULIN

This group of hills is between the road along Glen Torridon / Loch Torridon and the Glencarron road to the south. Only hills reached from the Torridon side are included here. The hills are divided between Coulin and Bendamph estates.



The great dividing line between the North West and the rest of the Highlands, the Moine Thrust, passes just to the east of these hills (p35). The thrust has had an obvious effect on the four eastern hills, confusing the two rocks of which they are made: Torridonian sandstone and Cambrian quartzite.

The Coulin terrain is often rough, but some excellent stalkers' paths run through it. A visit to the small Meall Dearg is recommended: it gives outstanding views of the hills, and is set in a lovely area of exposed sandstone (map square 93 51).

from Beinn Damh (p37):

Sgurr Dubh
(p34)

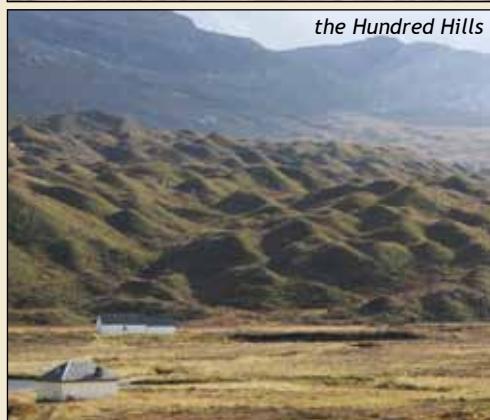
Sgorr nan L. Uaine
(p34)

Beinn Liath Mhor
(p35)

Sgorr Ruadh [Maol Chean-dearg]
(p36) (p37)



the Hundred Hills



SGURR DUBH

SGORR NAN LOCHAN UAIN

These two hills, the Sgurr and the Sgorr (two variants of the same word), are made of alternating sandstone which is easy, and rough quartzite which requires careful route-finding to avoid difficult unstable scree; where the quartzite is solid and dry, it can give good stepped scrambling. The hills are at each end of a broad knobbly mostly sandstone ridge. Because of the terrain, and also because of the excellent views, they are definitely fine-weather hills.

Sgurr Dubh is a show-off: not very high, but prominent in the view as you drive on the A832 west towards Achnasheen, and dominating Glen Torridon as you approach Loch Clair. Perhaps the easiest route up it is a walk along the Loch Clair track to Coulin Lodge, and the path west up to Coire an Leth-ullt. The more usual route is from the big Coire Dubh car park along the good path south, past the Ling Hut (Scottish Mountaineering Club) and the extraordinary and famous Corrie/Valley of a Hundred Hills – hummocky glacial moraines, an entertaining micro-mountain range (*p33 picture*). Count burn crossings, and follow the third burn up until it enters an impressive gully, then climb up left to reach the lochan-speckled ridge. Find a way to the summit (difficult in cloud) past imbricated sandstone.

To reach Sgorr nan Lochan Uaine first, continue on the path for about 2km more, then follow up the burn which comes from Lochan Uaine. This takes you to a lovely area of sandstone slabs, a small lochan, and Lochan Uaine itself; it is worth spending time here. Then you can climb the hill above, circling it clockwise to avoid difficulties and trying to keep off wobbly scree. From the top, drop down with care to the ridge leading to Sgurr Dubh, a place of desolate beauty.

*scoor doo, black peak
scorr nan lokhan oo-an,
peak of green lochs
782m + 871m, two Corbetts
quartzite and sandstone*

the Sgurr from the road



the ridge to the the Sgurr; Beinn Eighe beyond



*ice-smoothed sandstone
and the Sgorr*



rough quartzite



BEINN LIATH MHOR

ben lee-a vor, big grey hill
926m, Munro
quartzite and sandstone



the summit from the west



the ridge from Sgorr Ruadh, showing imbrication



from Sgorr nan Lochan Uaine: ridge between lochs



Mountains and pushing rocks into chaos in front of it. The collective name “Moine Thrust” is usually given to this, but it was actually a series of thrusts. The movement stopped when it reached the Kinlochewe area, but the hills along its edge show its effects (p7,17,25,27,34-36). Great slices of rock were driven out of place so that several hills appear to be upside down, or the flat layering of sandstone topped by quartzite was turned into vertical alternating splinters of each rock alternately: “imbrication” (p27). In places a new metamorphic rock called mylonite was formed from the original rocks by the pressure (p25). This probably all happened deep underground. East of the Thrust, the hills are smoother and rounder (*left*), mostly made of softer Moine Schist.

Beinn Liath Mhor is a straight 2km-long ridge with three tops. The whole ridge can be seen from the road at the top of Glen Docherty, and from its neighbour Sgorr Ruadh. Seen end-on from Torridon to the west its summit appears to be a sharp cone. It is a classic example of imbrication: the ridge alternates between quartzite and sandstone (*see below*); large-scale folding can also be seen on its side.

The summit is at the west end of the ridge, and is quartzite. The easiest route up is the same as for Sgorr nan Lochan Uaine (*opposite*); at the first lochan head south west onto the ridge and then east to the top. Descend the same way. An adventurous alternative route is to pass Loch Uaine on its north side, cross the ridge between it and the next loch (also Loch Uaine), and climb towards the top: it is sandstone at first, and the final steep quartzite can be avoided by traversing to the right.

If you follow the scenic ridge from the summit to the east end, you will have to return, or else descend with care, avoiding crags, to the path which leads to the Coulin Lodge track, Loch Clair and the road.

The Moine Thrust

430 million years ago, a continent (“Baltica”) crashed into Scotland from the east like a giant bulldozer, driving up the Caledonian

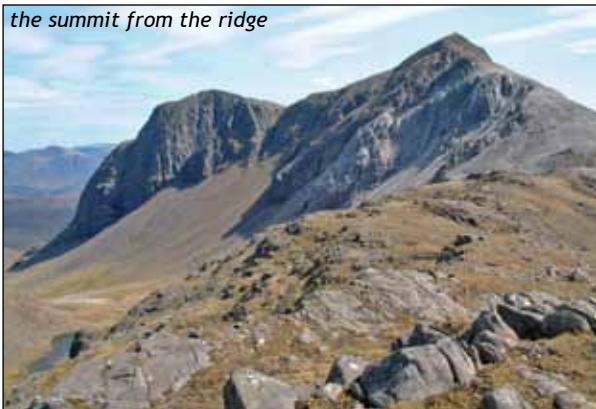
SGORR RUADH

scorr roo-a, red peak
962m, Munro
sandstone and quartzite

Sgorr Ruadh is the highest and finest of the Coulin hills. It is most often climbed from the south (with Beinn Liath Mhor), up broad easy slopes set above spectacular cliffs. But the approach from Glen Torridon is more satisfying: the varied and enjoyable north ridge with great views and a sharp summit. Due to imbrication there are two stretches of quartzite to cross.

From the Coire Dubh car park follow the Hundred Hills path (p34) south to its end and then continue heading for the north end of the hill. An easy climb takes you to the start of the ridge and a grand viewpoint. On the ridge there is a steep quartzite band to be scrambled up, some optional sandstone scrambling, then easy walking with the shapely summit ahead. A broad quartzite scree band has to be crossed (reasonably stable) before the final climb. There is one small scramble on the way to the summit. To return, after re-crossing the quartzite band, soon bear right down grassy slopes to a lochan in the pass below; then follow the path. Descend this at the foot of a high cliff, then leave it at the burn crossing to find your route back to the path to the car park. In good weather it has been a memorable walk.

the summit from the ridge



the ridge from Meall Dearg



nearing the summit



east from the summit



BEINN DAMH

Beinn Damh (or Damph) is the easiest of the big hills around Loch Torridon, but it still has plenty of character. (It is a good choice when there is snow.)

The walk starts close to sea level, at the Torridon Inn (useful at the end of the day). A good path leads through pine woods, high above the river. After leaving the wood, the path climbs up the hillside to Toll Ban, a shallow corrie. Easy slopes ahead reach the ridge. The northern top, Sgurr na Bana Mhoraire, is worth visiting for the views. On the main ridge south, the 868m top can be bypassed, and a mile of not-too-bad quartzite leads to the summit, poised above a cliff. A good alternative descent route is over the 868m top and down the east ridge of Toll Ban with interesting sandstone. Much more scary ascent routes take either of the steep corrie ridges east of the summit, reached by the path to Drochaid Coire Roill.

Beinn Damh has two neighbours.

BEINN NA H-EAGLAISE (737m, a Graham) is a good viewpoint, climbed without difficulty from either the Coire Roill path (with a river crossing) or the path from Annat to mis-spelt Loch an Eoin (or both).

MAOL CHEAN-DEARG (933m, a Munro, "bald red-head") is usually climbed from Coulags on the Strathcarron road, but you could reach this southern route by the Annat path. Its north and east sides are formidable: steep and well guarded.



the ridge to the distinctive summit



from the south east, summit and eastern corrie



leaving the summit



Maol Chean-Dearg from Sgurr Ruadh

