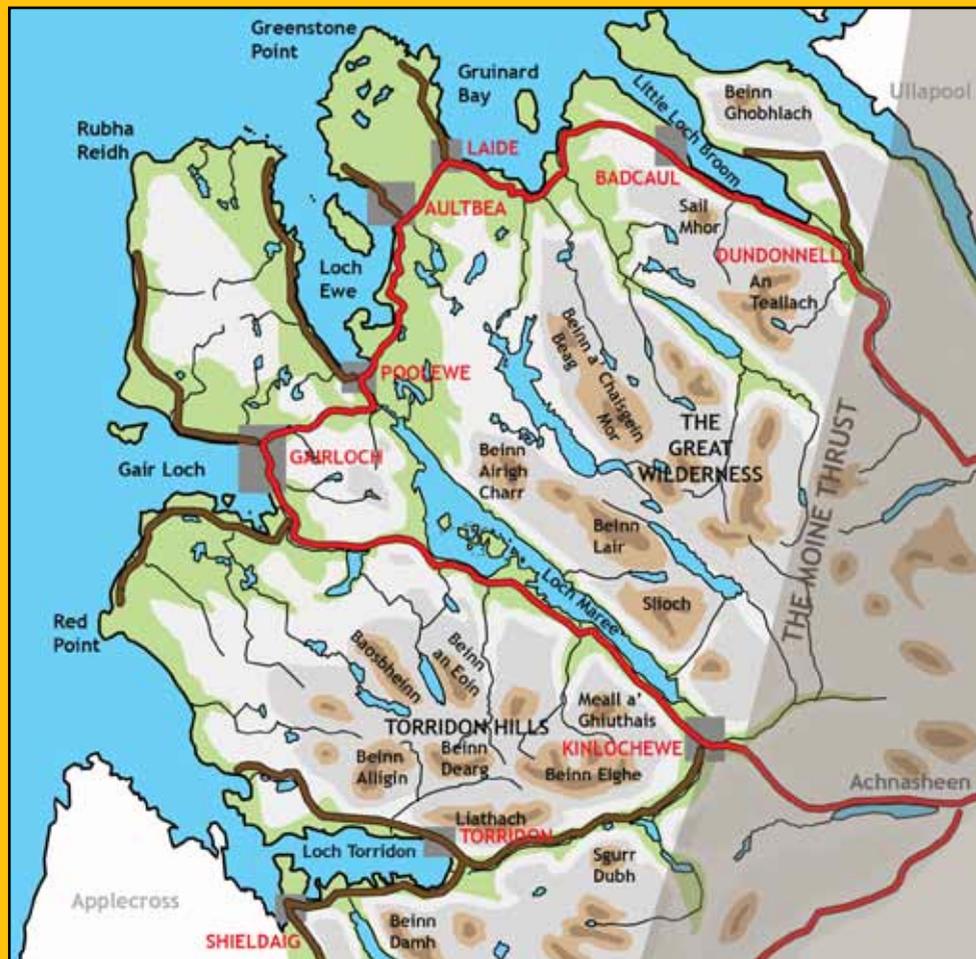


Guide to

GAIRLOCH and DISTRICT

Loch Torridon to Little Loch Broom : West of the Moine Thrust



This Guide aims to cover everything which can be seen and done along the **A832 road from Kinlochewe to Dundonnell, and its seven side roads**. This is the central part of **Wester Ross**, which is roughly defined as the region between Lochcarron and Achiltibuie. Its eastern boundary is an important geological feature, the Moine Thrust (p36). As you drive west along the A832, either from Achnasheen in the south or from Braemore Junction in the north, you cross into a different kind of landscape where the oldest rocks in Britain survive: a rugged and beautiful land of lochs and steep mountains.

Most people here live on the coast; Kinlochewe is the only major exception. Most of the settlements are “townships”, originating as scattered groups of crofts, each consisting of a stone cottage on 4 or 5 acres of land. The largest centre of population and main service centre is **Gairloch**, and this Guide imagines that you are based there.

This spectacular corner of Scotland is becoming better known thanks to the **North Coast 500** route. It contains most of the largest **National Scenic Area** (NSA) in Scotland; much of it is a **Wild Land Area**; and it is in the **Wester Ross UNESCO Biosphere**. The many highlights include the Torridon Hills, the Great Wilderness, Loch Maree, Beinn Eìghe National Nature Reserve, Inverewe Garden, Gairloch Museum. There are fine coastlines with many beaches, unique geology (p36), interesting history and archaeology (p34-5), wildlife (p33), and in this guide over 60 walks. And plenty of weather! **Index on page 37.**

- **Information:** The main Information Centre is at the **GALE Centre** (p5: 01445 712071), which can also advise on and book **Accommodation** (this Guide mentions hotels, hostels and campsites, but not guest houses or B&Bs). To find out what is happening where, read the fortnightly **Gairloch and District Times** (aka *Yellow Pages* or *Gairloch Times*), or listen to **Two Lochs Radio** on 106FM (p7). Many places and activities have **websites**.
- **Opening times** given are for the main season, roughly **APRIL/MAY to SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER**, and they **MAY CHANGE!** For updated times or out-of-season openings, see **Gairloch Times** (in shops, or online subscription at www.gairlochtimes.co.uk), or phone. **MANY PLACES CLOSE IN WINTER.**
- **Single-track roads:** most side roads, and one section of the A832, are single-track. Remember that a car following you may be in more of a hurry than you for a reason: stop at a Passing Place to let it pass you. No parking in Passing Places.
- **Maps and plans** should if possible be supplemented by **Ordnance Survey maps** (p37): Landranger (1:50,000) 19, or Explorers (1:25,000) 433-5 & 428-9; or Harvey's maps.
- **Paths** are often not up to lowland standards: choose your footwear carefully!
- **Hill walks** are mentioned (in boxes), but you will need a guidebook and experience to climb them. Higher hills are called Munros (^M: over 3000ft), Corbetts (^C: 2500-3000ft), or Grahams (^G: 2000-2500ft). *See also the companion booklet "Hills of Wester Ross".*
- **Scottish Access Law** says that you may walk anywhere (with certain obvious exceptions) so long as you exercise common sense, care and responsibility. Wild camping is allowed in the same spirit.

• **NB All activities and walks mentioned in this guide are carried out at your own risk.**

Businesses: **RED** = Shops / Services, **BLUE** = Eating / Hotels, **GREEN** = Leisure / Activities. **BROWN** = Walks, Brown **BOXES** = Hills (^M = Munro, ^C = Corbett, ^G = Graham: *see above*).
P = Parking (always free except at Inverewe). **MTuWThFSaSu** : days of the week.
aka (also known as) gives a local alternative name for a feature.
(p7) = see page 7. (*rooa ray*) = pronunciation (approximate! NB *ch* always *kh*, never *tch*).
Distances: on roads these are in miles (approx), otherwise in kilometres and metres.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of information in this Guide, but changes and mistakes do happen! Please send changes, errors, omissions and suggestions to the author, Jeremy Fenton : jeremyfenton@btinternet.com

GAIRLOCH

Gairloch is not a single village but a collection of villages or communities surrounding the loch of the same name (from Gaelic *gearr loch*, short loch). Gair Loch is also often called Loch Gairloch to distinguish it from the place.

The total population of Gairloch and nearby townships is about 1130, and of the whole area covered in this Guide about 2300.

There is some disagreement about the definition of Gairloch. The three areas shown to the right are central. Beyond them are many other settlements along the loch shore and beyond, north to Melvaig and south to Red Point (aka the “Overside”), some or all of which may consider themselves to be part of Gairloch.

Until 1849 there were no proper roads to the district, and almost no wheeled vehicles! Visitors to Gairloch came by sea, or by boat along Loch Maree and then horseback. At that time Strath was the main village, servicing a crofting community; Achtercairn was a single farm; Charlestown was, as now, the harbour, with Flowerdale inland, the seat of the Mackenzie lairds.

The view west from Gairloch is to Trotternish, one of the peninsulas of Skye, 22 miles away; the main ridge stretches from the Storr in the south to the Quiraing in the north.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

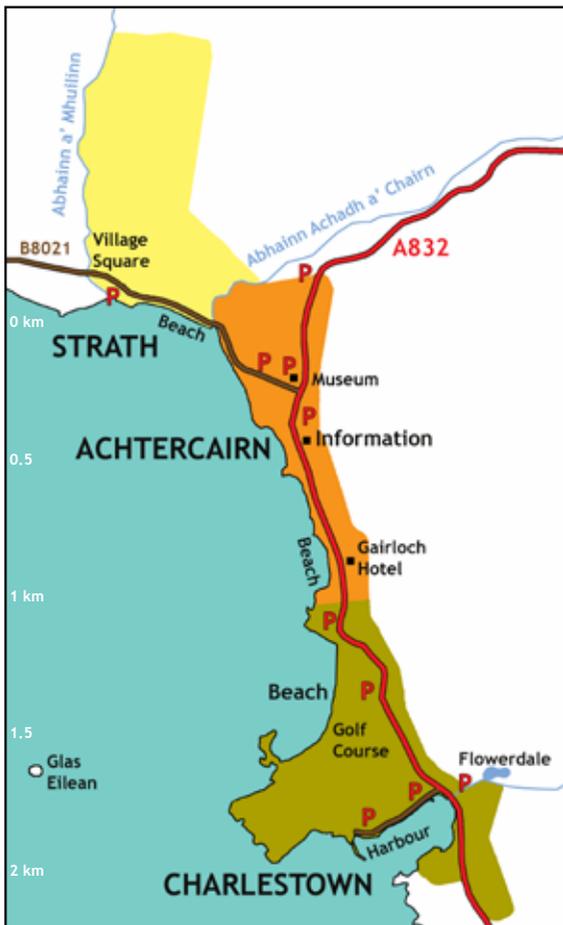
Westerbus, based at the Garage (p5) 01445 712255, operates local buses.

TIMES FROM STRATH (p7):

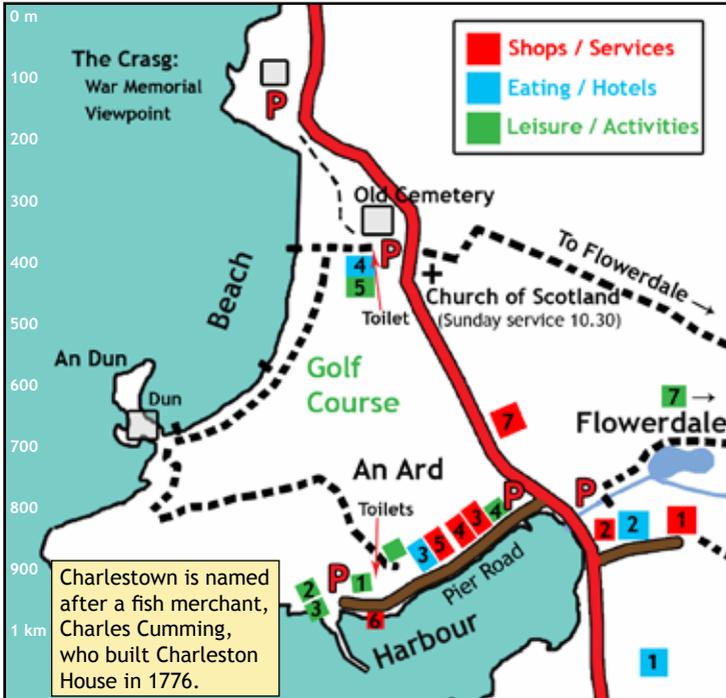
To Inverness: MWSa North route (via Dundonnell) 7.50 arr 10.25 (return 5.20 arr 8.00)
TuThF South route (via Kinlochewe) 8.25 arr 10.20 (return 5.20 arr 7.25)

To Dingwall (via Kinlochewe): W only 9.30 arr 11.05 (return 1.05 arr 2.45)

On school days there are also buses along the side roads. NB Always check times!



CHARLESTOWN



Arriving from the south, you emerge suddenly from woodland to see Gairloch Harbour on your left and Charlestown (or Charleston). To your right is the fertile glen of Flowerdale, historic seat of the Gairloch lairds. Above the harbour is the wooded ridge of An Ard, and beyond it the bay with the **BEACH**, the biggest and best of Gairloch's three (*Gaineamh Mhor*, the Big Sand: bathing), and the Golf Course neatly tucked in behind.

The Harbour is used by fishing and creel boats, yachts, and sight-seeing boats. Fishing from the pier may be fruitful. Alongside Pier Road is the **Sitooterie**, an award-winning garden/seating area/wildlife viewing point, set up by local people.

Shops and Services

- DIY STORE:** Les Buchan. Tools, electrical, timber etc: M-F 9-5, Sa 9-1 (01445 712332).
- ART GALLERY:** Solas. Paintings, prints and ceramics: M-Sa 1-5 (01445 712626).
- GENERAL STORE:** The Shop at the Pier. Food and much more: M-Sa 9-5.30, Su 10-5.30 (01445 712700). **POST OFFICE.** Fishing permits. Note the Sitooterie opposite!
- ART GALLERY:** The Anchorage. M-F 9-4, Su 10-4 (01445 712005).
- GIFT SHOP:** The Treasure Chest. M-Sa 10-5, Su 10-4 (01445 712500).
- FISH STALL:** Dry Island Shellfish. Fresh locally caught sea food: M-F 10-4. Shellfish available all year at 01445 741263 (p10). Also creel-boat trip bookings.
- BANK:** Bank of Scotland. M-F 9.15-12.30, 1.30-4.45, exc W open 9.30 (01445 252000). **24-hr cash machine.**

Eating and Hotels

- HOTEL:** Highland Lodge. Sister hotel of the Old Inn, accommodation only.
- HOTEL and RESTAURANT:** The Old Inn. Meals (esp. sea food), bar with live music (01445 712006). Originally a changehouse from 1792.
- CAFE:** Coast Coffee Company. Snacks, breakfast, lunch, coffees, juices etc: 9-5 every day (01445 712437).
- CAFE:** The Links Cafe/Bar. Tea, coffee, snacks, meals: Tu-Su 10- (01445 712407).

Leisure and Activities

1-3 BOAT TRIPS. Available in season on and beyond the loch:

- **1 Glendale Self-Drive Boats.** (01445 741755)
- **2 Gairloch Marine Wildlife Centre and Cruises.** Cruises, research and wildlife display: 9.30-3; www.porpoisegairloch.co.uk (01445 712636).
- **3 Hebridean Whale Cruises.** Sea angling, RIB cruises; www.hebridean-whale-cruises.com (01445 712458).

4 GAIKLOCH BOAT CLUB.

5 GOLF COURSE. 9 holes; all players welcome; Clubhouse open 9-5 (with **CAFE**).

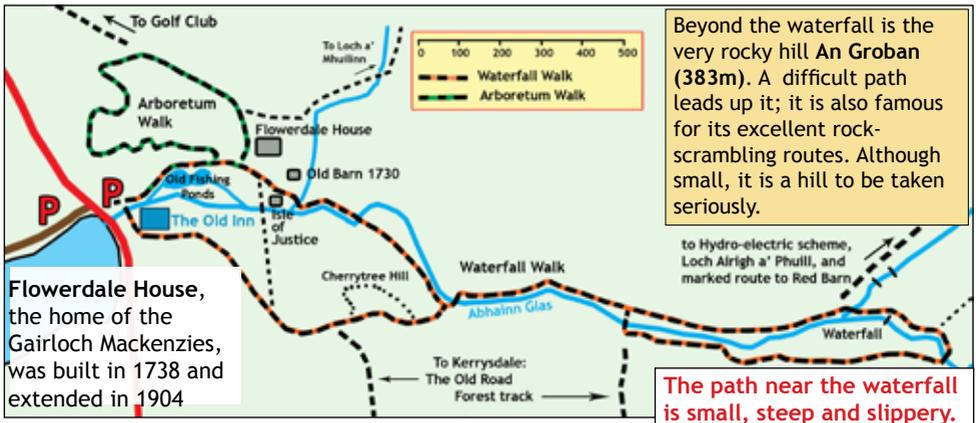
The **Gairloch Trekking Centre** has moved to Red Point (p11): 07769 838528.

NW Highlands **SNORKEL TRAIL site 9** is around An Dun; 4 other sites lie on the road north.

Flowerdale Paths

In Flowerdale a popular network of paths takes you around the Arboretum or as far as the Waterfall. N.B. Please DO NOT walk on the drive but keep to the footpaths, and respect the privacy of the houses in the glen.

- **Waterfall Walk:** good paths except near the Waterfall. (5km circuit)
- **Arboretum Walk:** some steep; through trees mostly planted in 1885. (1.5km)
- **The Old Road Walk:** see page 12; the Forest track to Kerrysdale is easier but longer.



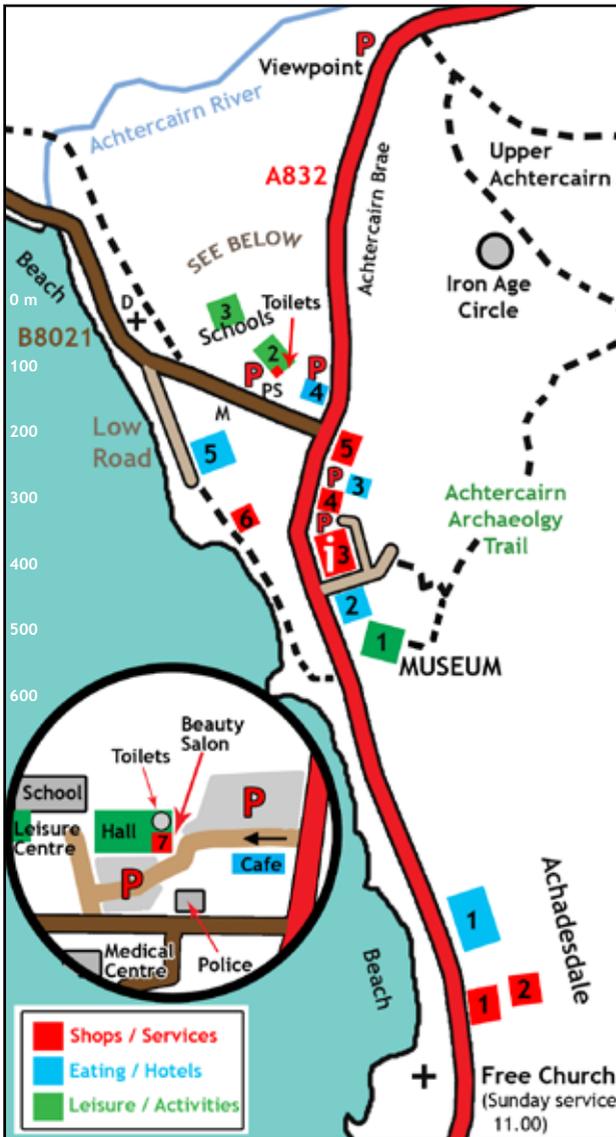
An Ard and Beach Paths

• **An Ard and Beach Walk.** From just beyond the Cafe (3) a path leads over the wooded ridge of An Ard to the Beach; it gives good village views to the north. It leads to the peninsula of An Dun, the site of an old fortified area, a **Dun**. Overgrown walls and a defensive ditch (between the outer and inner parts) can be made out; some vitrification has been found (see the left ditch). Its original date is unknown (perhaps BC); it was used by the MacBeaths, then the Macleods whose last stronghold it was before they were ousted by the Mackenzies (p34).

A path leads on between beach and golf course, or walk the beach, to the car park at the **Golf Club**. Return to the Harbour by the main road pavement. (2.5km)

- **Crags to Beach.** A small steep path, often overgrown, leads down from the road at the bend near the Crags high point to the beach past the **Old Cemetery**.
- Beyond the Crags viewpoint sign you can walk down to interesting rock near the shore.

ACHTERCAIRN



Achtercairn (also spelt Auchtercairn) is the central village and in modern times has become the main service centre, with the High School (claimed to have the biggest slate roof in Europe when built in 1994!), Primary School, Community Hall with toilets, Museum, Information Centre, Medical Centre, Dentist, Police Station with Council Service Point, etc.

The southern part, around Gairloch Hotel, is strictly called Achadesdale, but is included here for convenience.

People have lived here from Neolithic times; evidence of the prehistoric inhabitants can be seen in Upper Achtercairn. The Iron Age ceremonial circle shown on the plan is especially notable (p6). Later, the fertile raised beaches and slopes accommodated up to 17 smallholdings, rented from Gairloch Estate. In 1800 the whole area became a single farm, replacing the smallholdings. In the past 150 years the fields of the farm have gradually been built over.

Gairloch's three beaches have variable amounts of sand, fed by offshore sandbanks. Look for birds on the water such as mergansers, eiders,

cormorants and divers; gannets can often be seen further out. You may see porpoises or, further out, dolphins.

M = MEDICAL CENTRE: GP appointments M-F 9-11, MThF 3-4.15, W 4.30-6.30 (01445 712229); www.TwoLochsGP.co.uk. Also note the Pharmacy along the shore in Strath.

D = DENTIST: Dr Dawn Pickering. Private only (01445 712240).

PS = POLICE STATION (0845 600 5703); with **HIGHLAND COUNCIL SERVICE POINT:** M-F 9.30-1.

Shops and Services

- 1 **FILLING STATION and GIFT SHOP.** M-Sa 8.30-5.30. With **24-hour self-service pump**, pay by card. **Fishing permits.**
- 2 **GARAGE: Mackenzie and MacLennan.** All services and repairs (01445 712255).
- 3 **INFORMATION CENTRE: GALE Centre.** Information, accommodation & booking, books, gifts, exhibitions, snacks, etc: 7 days 9-5, Sundays Easter-Sept, shorter hours in winter (01445 712071). GALE = “Gairloch And Loch Ewe” Action Forum, a community-owned social enterprise and charity; they also provide regular local produce Markets in Gairloch, Poolewe and Aultbea (see *Gairloch Times*).
- 4 **HOUSEHOLD etc GOODS: Farm and Garden.** All kinds of hardware, DIY, pet food, clothing, vet surgery, gas cylinders, farm food, etc: M-Sa 9-5 (01445 712083).
- 5 **FOOD STORE: McColl’s (aka the Wildcat).** M-F 7-9, Sa 8-9, Su 9-7 (01445 712242). **POST OFFICE** (exc W 12.15-2.15), **Cash machine** (free, indoors).
- 6 **CURIOS: The Cabin.** Pottery, optical equipment, militaria, etc (07759 543951).
- 7 **BEAUTY SALON: Beautopia.** Beauty and holistic therapy, haircutting (07717 013904).

Eating and Hotels

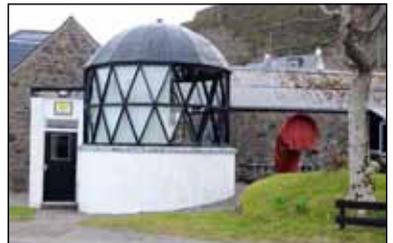
- 1 **HOTEL: Gairloch Hotel.** Bar menus 12-9, Restaurant 6-9 (01445 712001). Non-residents are welcome.
This impressive building dates from 1872 (the older middle section) and was extended later by the two wings; the old block at the back was originally a Poor House. More than any other building, the Hotel first put Gairloch on the map; at first most visitors arrived by sea.
There are steps down to the **BEACH** opposite the hotel’s south end.
- 2 **RESTAURANT: The Shieling.** Cafe, restaurant, lounge bar: all meals: Mo-Sa 9.30-5, 6-8.30 (01445 712888).
- 3 **CHINESE TAKEAWAY: Hai Yang.** 7 days, 4-10: orders to collect 01445 712756.
- 4 **CAFE: The Steading Cafe Bistro.** Light meals, drinks: 8.30am-late.
- 5 **HOTEL: The Myrtle.** Restaurant and bar, all meals, takeaway (01445 712004).

Leisure and Activities

- 1: **Gairloch Museum** www.gairlochheritagemuseum.org

The Museum was opened in 1977 by Gairloch and District Heritage Society in a 19th-century farm steading. In 2019 it moved into its new home, the former AAOR (Anti-Aircraft Operations Room). This was built in the early 1950s as one of four Scottish control centres for air defence in the Cold War, and was converted in the 1980s into Highland Council’s reserve nuclear bunker. Until 2018 it was the Council roads depot until a major project turned it into the Museum.

It holds a large collection illustrating the culture, history and nature of the area.



2 COMMUNITY HALL. Events and activities are advertised in *Gairloch Times*. The building includes **PUBLIC TOILETS**.

3 LEISURE CENTRE: attached to Gairloch High School. See *Gairloch Times* for programme and times: Games Hall, Climbing Wall, Activities (01445 712476).

GO FURTHER SCOTLAND provides mountain guides for those who want to rock climb, hill climb, walk, etc: (01445 771260 / 01854 633367) www.gofurtherScotland.co.uk

TORRIDON MUNRO GUIDES offer guided mountain walking, and also sea kayaking with Gairloch Kayak and Canoe Centre: (01145 771006) www.walkandwild.com

Achtercairn Archaeology Trail

Above Achtercairn a network of paths in varied scenery takes you on an archaeology and nature tour in a scenic area.

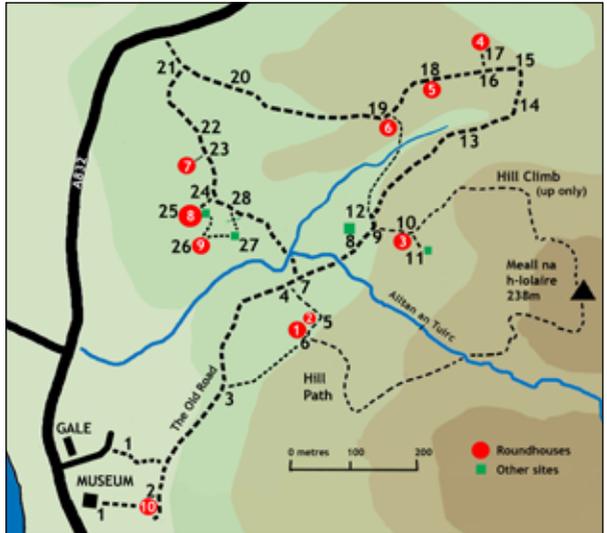
You can also climb the hill Meall na h-Iolaire (238m) with good views (*picture below*). A leaflet or a detailed *Guidebook* is available from the Museum or GALE Information Centre.

The 2-hour walk round the prehistoric remains is the best of its kind in Wester Ross. Four of the “Roundhouses” have been dated: **R1** 726BC (a Bronze Age house), **R2** 2769BC (a Neolithic stone-working area) and also used 1390BC, **R8** 254BC (an important Iron Age ceremonial circle), **R9** 477BC (Iron Age, with a good hearth exposed).

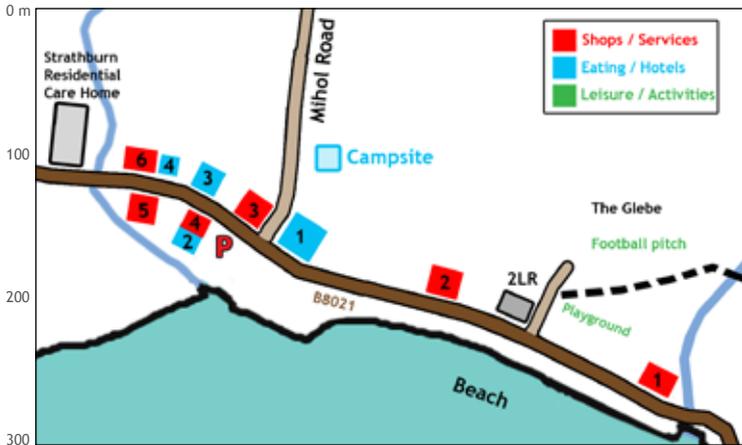
... And Beyond

Beyond these paths there is a largely pathless region of hills and lochs, enclosed by the A832 and Loch Maree. In 2002-7 this area (including the area of the paths above) was planted with 2.5 million native trees: Scots Pine, Birch, Rowan, Alder and Oak. This “Baile Mor” scheme was the biggest such project in Scotland. As you will see, the planting has met with mixed success; on higher ground it has virtually failed.

There is plenty of excellent rough walking in this area of “knock and lochan”, many small rocky hills (ten over 300m) and lochs. It needs care and self-reliance, and a map. Access is also from Flowerdale (p3), the Red Barn (p13) and the Slattadale-Tollie path (p14,22). Beware of holes in the ground made for the tree-planting!



STRATH



Strath was the original Gairloch village, at the centre of a crofting community. Today the “village square” has the main concentration of shops, and the crofts above are built over with modern houses. Below the road are old houses, among which there was once a mill.

Beware: **P**arking space is limited.

“2LR” on the plan is the studio of Two Lochs Radio, the smallest commercial radio station in Britain, broadcasting on 106 and 106.6 FM, morning and evening. Local News, Forecasts and What’s On: M-F 7.30-9.00am. Listen online at www.2LR.co.uk

The **Glebe** is an area belonging to the Church of Scotland (the largest house is the former Manse). At its foot (behind the wooden pre-fabricated post-war “Swedish houses” on the road) there is a **playground**, and above is a **football pitch**.

Campsite: caravans, tents, small bunkhouse etc (01445 712373 and website).

The **BEACH** here varies, often showing sand only when the tide is low.

Shops and Services

- 1 GIFTS and CLOTHING etc: Buddha by the Sea.** Global inspirations, fairly-traded products, clothing, gifts etc: 7 days 10-5.30 (01445 712330).
- 2 PHARMACY.** Medicines, toiletries, advice, etc; M-F 9-5.30, Sa 9-1 (01445 712840).
- 3 FOOD STORE: McColl’s (aka Strath Store).** M-Sa 8-6 (01445 712499).
- 4 BOOKSTORE: Hillbillies.** “The biggest little bookstore in the West”: 7 days 9-6.
- 5 BUTCHER and GREENGROCER: Kenneth Morrison.** M-Sa 7.30-5.30 (01445 712485).
- 6 STATIONER etc: Cornerstone.** Newspapers, cards, gifts, toys, crafts etc: M-Sa 9-5 (01445 712400).

Eating and Hotels

- 1 HOTEL and RESTAURANT: Millcroft Hotel.** Bars, meals and takeaway (01445 712376).
- 2 COFFEE SHOP: Mountain Coffee Company.** Specialist coffees etc and home-baking in quiet surroundings: 7 days 9-6 (01445 712316). Attached to Hillbillies Bookstore.
- 3 FISH and CHIPS: Beachcomber. Cafe and Takeaway.**
- 4 TAKEAWAY: Crumbs.** Sandwiches, soup, pies etc: M-F 8-4, Sa 9-3.

There is off-path walking from the top of **Mihol Road**, but no public parking. Straight ahead is the hill Meall na Dubh Chlaise (166m). To the right of it an old path, much of it now lost, leads eventually to Loch Ewe (Naast, p30). (7.5km one way)

B8021 : Gairloch to Melvaig

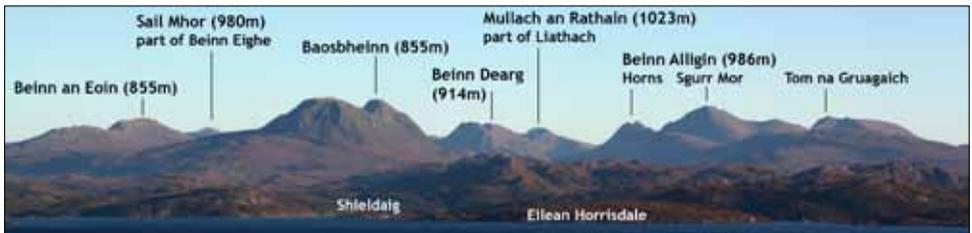
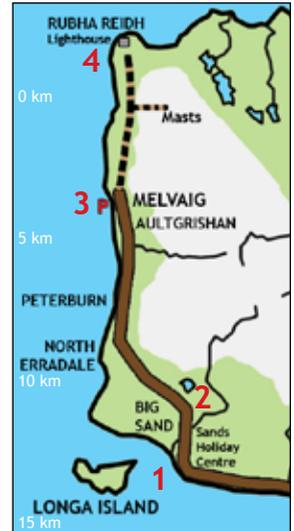
This road passes through or near a series of former crofting townships. These were created in 1845 when Gairloch Estate divided the land into crofts of about 4 acres each and allocated them to the former smallholders (“cottars”); there were no serious “clearances”, only “improvements” (p35). Today modern houses are laid out on many of the crofts, several on each.

(See *The Road to the Lighthouse* by Dorothy Malone.)

1 To Sands Holiday Centre 4 miles from A832

Driving west from Strath, you pass the residential communities of **SMITHSTOWN** and **LONEMORE**, former crofting townships; beyond them, **FASAICH** is an entirely modern housing area. The road then follows the rocky coast; look back for fine views of some of the Torridon hills (below). Two miles from Strath you pass **Carn Dearg Youth Hostel** (SYHA); this was built in the 1880s as a private house, and became a hostel in 1932.

The road now turns north into the Sands area with its **BEACH** and the large and popular camping and caravan site, **Sands Holiday Centre** (01445 712152, website), which has a **Shop** (9-6) and the **Barn Cafe** serving meals and snacks (9-5,6-8; 01445 712688). Opposite is **Longa Island**, once inhabited but now used only for grazing livestock. It may have been used by Vikings as winter quarters; the *-a* in the name is from the Norse for *island*. NW Highlands **Snorkel Trail site 8** is here.



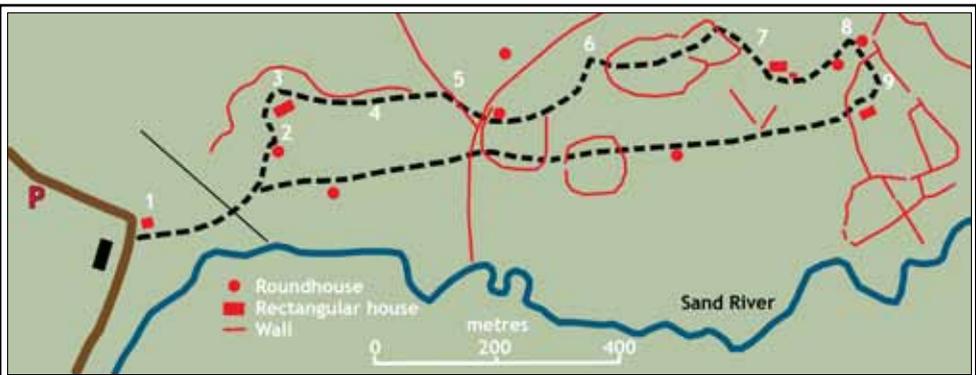
2 To Sand Archaeology Trail 5 miles

The road now becomes single-track. After crossing the River Sand (bridge rebuilt 2012), it passes the turning to **BIG SAND** village (no services), another former crofting area. At the next sharp left bend, opposite the former Sand School, is the start of:

Sand Archaeology Trail: parking further along the road at a small quarry. There is a guidebook, but it is currently out of print (try the Museum); see opposite for a summary. Beyond the trail there are another 20 or more roundhouses (shown on the OS maps).

3 To Melvaig 10 miles

From here to the end of the road you pass a series of crofting townships: **NORTH ERRADALE** off the road, **PETERBURN**, **AULTGRISHAN** and (joined to it) **MELVAIG**. Beware cattle on the road! The road is often high above the sea with cliffs and several beaches below. Views are now to the west: Skye, and the Outer Hebrides with the smaller Shiant Islands in front of them. The Melvaig Inn is now closed.



Sand Archaeology Trail (2.5km; the numbers 1-9 are on stone markers)

- 1 This old barn, c1876, belonged to the schoolmaster (house and school opposite).
- 2 Prehistoric roundhouse 12.5m diameter; later structures, perhaps lambing pens, on the south west and inside. (*Bracken may make it hard to see some sites!*)
- 3 Rectangular building, perhaps on the site of an earlier roundhouse; adapted later as a small sheep pen.
- 4 Remains of a stone wall, probably prehistoric like most of the stone walls here.
- 5 The two long walls which you cross are made of turf. East of them is a 14m roundhouse; another is in heather to the north. Keep the rock outcrop (possibly quarried) 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; the limited amount of stone suggests that the upper walls were made of turf. 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. It may have belonged to the shepherd Donald Bain who worked here after 1845.

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

4 To Rubha Reidh (aka Rua Reidh, Rudha Reidh, Ru Re, etc) 3.5 miles / 5 km

From Melvaig a small road continues to **Rubha Reidh Lighthouse** (*rooa ray*). This narrow road is private, but you are permitted to drive it with care, or you can park at the start and walk or cycle the 5km. NB: (1) Vehicle weight limit **7½ tons**, width **2.1m**, speed limit **20mph**; (2) insurance and recovery **may not cover you** here.

The road stays high above the sea; there is some good rock scenery to explore along the coast below. A side road leads up to the prominent masts (BBC etc, first built 1965).

Please **park at the quarry as indicated** and walk from there. **NB** The lighthouse buildings and area are private: **Rua Reidh Guesthouse** and Self-catering (www.stayatalighthouse.co.uk).

Built in 1912 by David Stevenson, the Lighthouse is 25m high; the original lens is now in Gairloch Museum. Follow the track right past huge slabs of Torridonian sandstone (*Rubha Reidh* means *smooth cape*) to the old jetty.

Cliff Walk. From here small rough paths lead east along the coast to view cliffs and stacks. You can continue about 3km, as far as the fine sandy bay Camas Mor (descend with care at the far end, very steep; see also p30). **NB** A good head for heights and surefootedness are needed on this part of the coast.



B8056: Kerrysdale to Red Point

This winding single-track road follows the wooded south side of Gair Loch (aka the Overside) and then the tree-less coast to the farm and beaches at Red Point. A path continues from there to Diabaig and Loch Torridon.

The road to Badachro was a "Destitution Road" (p35), built by 1849, servicing crofters and fishermen. (See *Exploring Gairloch's South Side* by Dorothy Malone.)



1 To Shieldsaig

The road crosses the River Kerry and skirts oak woods (a track to the left after the cattle grid opens up exploratory walking possibilities), then follows a little glen down to the sea at SHIELDSAIG (*sild-vik* is Norse for Herring Bay; not to be confused with the village Shieldsaig on Loch Torridon) and the **Shieldsaig Lodge Hotel** (meals, 01445 741333) which was built about 1868 as a shooting lodge; **Falconry** (01445 741738) and other activities are on offer. Just beyond the hotel there is parking, left, in a quarry, a base for walks:

(1) **Remote Lochs.** Walk back past the hotel to a track, right, over a ford/bridge: signpost "Torridon 13 miles". This takes you south to Loch Braigh Horrisdale, along the river beyond it past waterfalls to Loch Gaineamhach (7.5km), and lastly to Loch a' Bhealach, remotely positioned between the hills Baosbheinn and Beinn Alligin. (11km one way) This area was the proposed site of a controversial hydro-electric scheme, refused in 2004. Torridon can be reached by the pass between Beinns Dearg and Alligin.

(2) **Fairy Lochs.** Start the above walk, and look for an obvious sign to the left. Follow the rough path to a loch, and then a second loch. (2km one way) Here a memorial and pieces of aircraft wreckage mark the site where in 1945 an American B-24H Liberator, taking servicemen home, crashed. The cause is not known; it may have been an engine fire, or it may have crashed while searching in cloud for an emergency landing site. There were no survivors. *Please respect the site, which is a War Grave.* An alternative return, often boggy, follows a burn SW to Loch Braigh Horrisdale.

(3) **Woodland.** Go along the shore past the Hotel and take a track into the woods, climbing a gate. Explore the fine oak and birch woods, and, if you feel like it, the complex country beyond which has few paths, a loch, woods, and the River Kerry mouth with small beaches and many seagulls and ducks (thanks to the fish hatchery opposite).

1½ miles from Kerrysdale junction

2 To Badachro

3 miles

Continue the road along Loch Shieldsaig with Shieldsaig Island (look out for seals and herons), then inland to Loch Bad a' Chrotha, across its river and down to the village of BADACHRO: car park on the shore. Here the **Badachro Inn** is beside the bay to the right, with meals in a picturesque position (book at 01445 741255). **Latitude 57** sells gifts, arts and crafts (M-F 10-5, Sa 10-4, Su 11-4; 01445 741339). Beyond the bay is Eilean Horrisdale, an island with some holiday homes. Just across the bay is Dry Island (aka the Republic of Isonia: www.isonia.com), which offers boat **Shellfish Safaris** (booking essential 01445 741263, all year, www.shellfishsafaris.com), reached by the side road right at the end of Badachro, a path down, and a sometimes floating causeway.

An Torr walks. The high ground east of the river, reached from minimal parking space at the bridge across Badachro River, gives excellent views of the bay and Horrisdale Island, and of Gairloch beyond. The woodland walking along the river has been ruined by a badly bulldozed track (for a proposed marina). But if you turn right at the first clear access uphill, you can use small cattle-trodden paths to reach the hilltops. It is worth going north to the rocky outcrops overlooking the bay.

3 Three Villages

Next come three villages which are almost joined together. Typically for former crofting townships, their houses are widely scattered.

PORT HENDERSON (4½ miles), was built in 1815 for fishing, but mainly used for crofting from 1845. **Argocat Extreme** offers off-road adventures (M-Sa, 01445 741336).

OPINAN (6 miles) has a sandy **BEACH** with rough parking.

Opinan to Port Henderson coastal walk. Take the beach path, then turn right on a small path which leads easily along above the coast; alternatively, there is good rock scrambling along the slabby shore. The coast finally becomes less rocky and reaches the point Sron na Carra (aka Carr Point). About 300m before the point, opposite two prominent rocks in the sea, there is the “Cave of Gold”, reachable by a scramble at low/middle tide; exploration needs a torch, and is difficult underfoot. (2km one way)

SOUTH ERRADALE (7 miles) is the last village. Noteworthy here is the bridge on which you cross the meandering River Erradale: built in 1873, it is a “listed building”, with 14 concrete arches. **Glendale House** offers a Lounge Bar and meals/takeaways: Tu-Sa 6-10.30 (check times at 01445 741741).

4 To Red Point

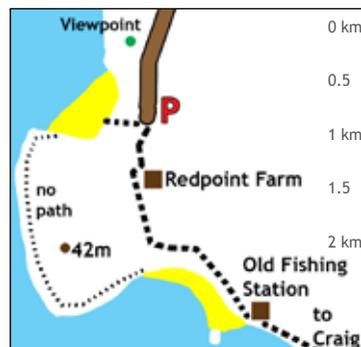
9 miles

The road now climbs above the sea with views of the islands of Raasay, Rona and Skye. Look out for the **Viewpoint** (view below) before the final descent to **RED POINT** and a car park. Note the rare and oddly-sited letterbox: VR, Queen Victoria.

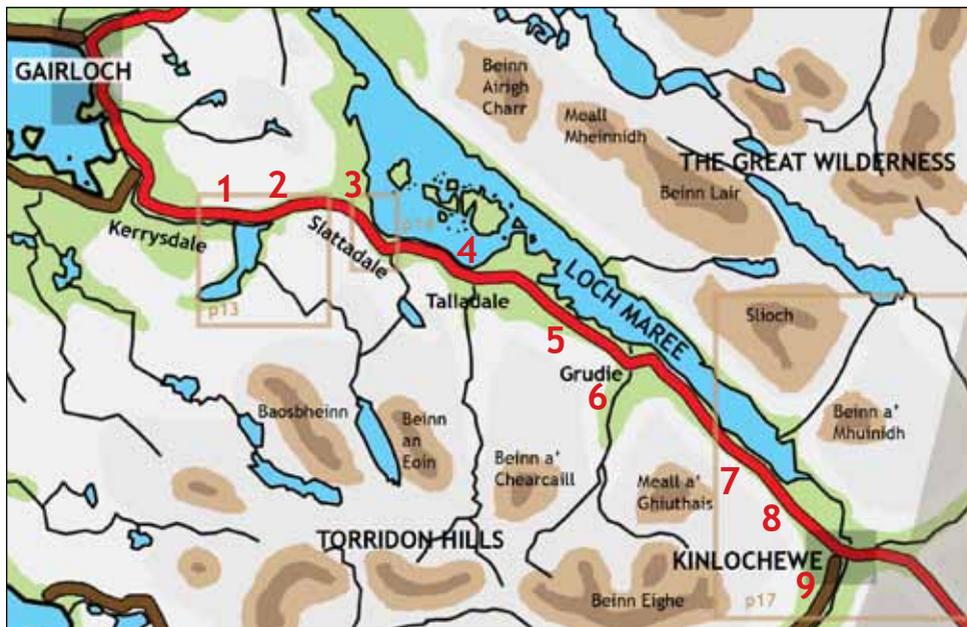
Gairloch Trekking Centre offers Pony Trekking (07769 838528). A short walk takes you down to the red-sanded **BEACH**. In the dunes above it, a major Mesolithic and Neolithic stone “factory” was found, now re-buried. **Two walks:**

(1) **The Other Beach.** A track goes south past Redpoint Farm (with some of the best fields in the area) to a second **BEACH**; at the far end of this are the buildings of a former Fishing Station, which used nets to catch salmon. You can complete a circuit by walking back round the coast to the first beach, keeping high at first to avoid boggy ground. (6km)

(2) **To Craig.** The Fishing Station path continues along the coast, narrow and in places quite rough, to the abandoned settlement of Craig (8km one way). At Craig River, keep left over boulders and through trees to the bridge. The building beyond was used as a Youth Hostel until 2003 and is now an open bothy. The path continues uphill and overland to Diabaig (p19), at the end of the Torridon road (12km); an obliging driver is needed for transport back to Gairloch (a plan to build a coast road in the 1970s came to nothing).



A832 SOUTH : Gairloch to Kinlochewe



The 18-mile stretch of the A832 from Gairloch to Kinlochewe is one of the best scenic drives in the country. The first part of the road is the oldest, leading from Flowerdale to Loch Maree where boats were taken along the loch. In 1763 a military road had been planned and started by Major Caulfeild, but it was never completed. Only in 1849 was the road from Slattadale to Kinlochewe completed, a “Destitution Road” (p35). The road was realigned and doubled in stages from 1960.

1 To Bad an Sgalaig Dam

In **Kerrysdale** (1½ miles) the road to Badachro and Red Point (p10) turns right over an old bridge, indicated by a gigantic road sign. The next section of the main road is still partly single-track or narrow but being widened in stages. It follows the **River Kerry** upstream past the Kerry Falls Power Station and hydro-electric scheme (1 MW, 56m head, built in 1952 originally to supply the local area). The falls near the top of the narrow glen were once a tourist attraction, but are now virtually empty and inaccessible; the water is piped down to the power station from the small reservoir at the top.

The main dam is at **Loch Bad an Sgalaig** (aka *na Sgalaig*), which is now joined to Dubh Loch beyond it. Opposite the dam (parking) is the start of the Old Road to Flowerdale.

The Old Road Walk. Replaced before 1850, this little “road” is now a good walk through varied scenery, and can also be used for access to the hill Sithean Mor (384m) to the north. There is interesting geology beside the road, including sulphide deposits which even include a little gold (you can’t miss the colourful rock). At Kerrysdale Farm the road enters woodland, and a footpath right cuts across above the farm. When this re-joins the track, you have a choice: the true Old Road is a path left, and may be wet; the track right is longer but easier: see the Flowerdale path system (p3). (6km / 7km one way)

4 miles from Charlestown

Mountains in Miniature

The more prominent of the hills (up to about 400m high) around Gairloch are virtually small-scale mountains. Made of Gneiss or Amphibolite, they are very rocky and rough, and give challenging walking and scrambling. Notable are: Meall Fuaraidh, An Groban (p3) and Sithean Mor around the head of Flowerdale; Meall Lochan a' Chleirich (rock climbing in "Stone Valley") and Meall a' Ghlas-Leothaid south of the Red Barn (below).

2 To the Green Shed (aka Red Barn or Red Stable)

4½ miles

Alongside Loch Bad an Sgalaig there is parking with a good view of the prominent northern end of **Baosbheinn** (*bershven*), Creag an Fhithich (738m): this was shaped by landslips whose remains (a "pro-talus rampart") can still be seen below it.

The name "Red" survives although the shed is green these days. It is a base (parking) for several walks, with an information board below the road. Over 1 million trees of native species, mostly pine, have been planted south of the road (completed 1997).

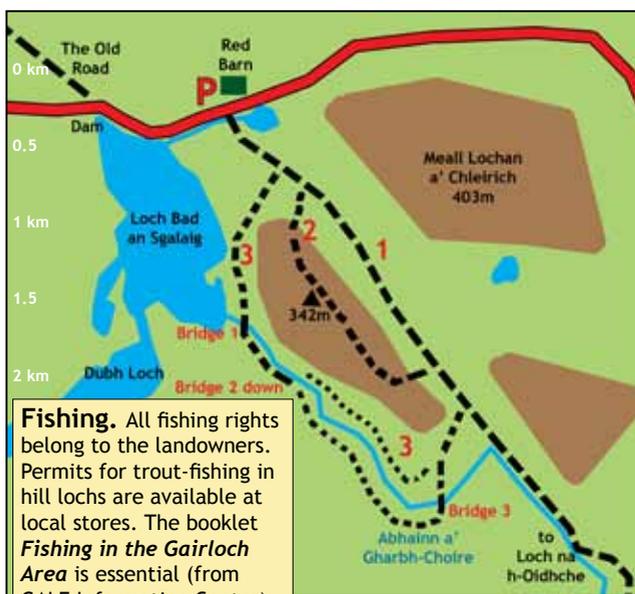
Walks. Northwards is a good access point for the rugged pathless hill country behind Gairloch (p6, map needed), where any of the small hills are worth climbing or the lochs can be targeted; a rough boggy route leads to Flowerdale, starting on a track and then marked by posts.

To the south Gairloch Estate has set up three walking routes:

(1) To Loch na h-Oidhche (*hooicha*). The main track, eroded and stony. After 6km a river is crossed on stepping stones (unless too high!); this is half of an unusual split river, leading to the Victoria Falls (p14), probably diverted to reduce flooding in Kerrysdale. You can extend the walk by the rough track along the loch to the remote private bothy Poca Buidhe at its south end. (7km to loch)

(2) Over Meall a' Ghlas-Leothaid (342m). A good introduction to the mini-mountains (see box above). The rough posted route leaves the track after about 750 metres, at the top of a steep section, and climbs up and along the ridge before descending back to the track. Perhaps better in reverse. (4.5km circuit)

(3) Waterfall walk. Turn right off the main track before a steep section to reach Loch Bad an Sgalaig on a rough path which may be muddy. Cross the first bridge above the waterfall. The second bridge is out of position; if you can cross here, do, but otherwise continue some way and up a slope to find the third bridge (posts mark the route). The path finally turns into a track before re-joining the main track. (8km circuit)



Baosbheinn^c (bershven) and Beinn an Eoin^c. These two Torridon hills are normally climbed from the Red Stable, using route (1) above. **Baosbheinn** summit (875m) is reached by climbing WSW from the start of Loch na h-Oidhche after a sometimes tricky river crossing; the traverse of the whole ridge from Poca Buidhe is a major undertaking, especially the steep final descent from Creag an Fhithich. The ridge of **Beinn an Eoin** (855m) is approached from the stepping stones, aiming for its left corner (good sandstone slabs), then up and along the ridge SSE to the summit.

4 To Slattadale

7 miles

The road descends to Loch Maree through old forestry plantations to the district of Slattadale. A Forestry Commission signpost here precedes an easily missed small road left down to the shore of **Loch Maree** (½ mile) where there is parking (with toilets) and a fine view of the 30+ islands and the hills beyond the loch. Walks:

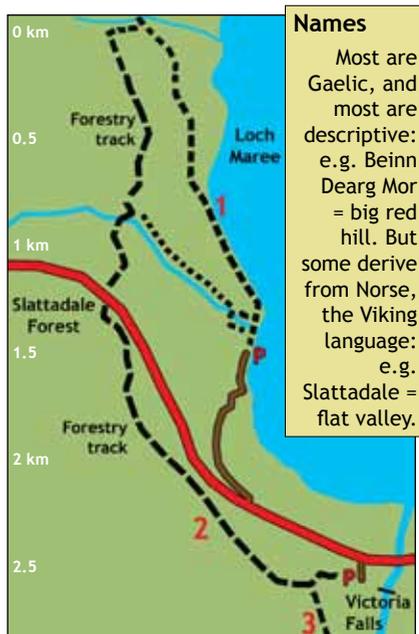
(1) To Tollie and Poolewe. A popular walk, needing transport for the return. After a ford or a footbridge upstream, the path follows the shore and then climbs over the pass to the west of rocky **Creag Mhor Thollaidh** (Tollie Rock, 343m), reaching a height of 243m. This was the route of the unfinished military road of 1763. It reaches the A832 a mile south of Poolewe. *(9km one way)*

From the footbridge near the start, a path follows the small River Slattadale to meet the Forestry Track; from a later fence-crossing the track can also be reached to make a short circuit (*below*).

A little further down the main road a signpost indicates **Victoria Falls**. These were named after the visit in 1877 of Queen Victoria, who stayed at the nearby Loch Maree Hotel. It is said that, to make the falls more impressive for her, a river was diverted upstream (but see p13)! The hurricane of 2005 destroyed the woodland here, but a circular path is well worth taking, starting with a viewing platform for the falls and then up the river.

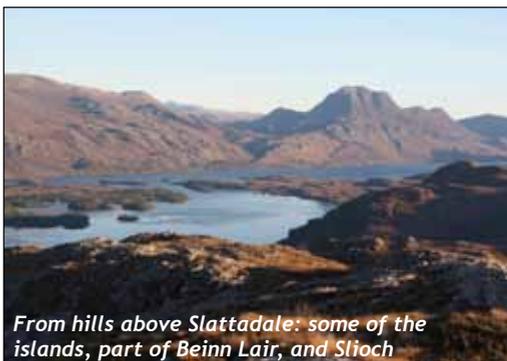
(2) Forestry track. This gives easy walking with some views. It crosses the A832 and then Slattadale River; here a path leads down to the Loch Maree car park. *(3km one way)* From the track end the Tollie path is reached by a new path down the hill.

(3) Loch Garbhaig. A short way up the above track, another track turns left and climbs to Loch Garbhaig, servicing a hydro-electric scheme. *(1.5km one way)* You can continue from here over pathless ground to reach the Loch na h-Oidhche track (p13).



Names

Most are Gaelic, and most are descriptive: e.g. Beinn Dearg Mor = big red hill. But some derive from Norse, the Viking language: e.g. Slattadale = flat valley.



From hills above Slattadale: some of the islands, part of Beinn Lair, and Slioch

Loch Maree

Loch Maree and Loch Lomond are rivals for the title of most beautiful Scottish loch. Loch Maree was originally called Loch Ewe, the inner or freshwater as opposed to the saltwater one (hence “Kinlochewe”); it was re-named after Saint Maelrubha (p34), probably in the 18th century. The further side of the loch is Lewisian rock (p36); notice the straightness of its shore, which follows the line of a major geological fault. **Letterewe House** opposite can only be reached by boat or on foot. The 30+ islands are part of Beinn Eithe and Loch Maree Islands National Nature Reserve because of their bird life (e.g. black-throated divers and sea eagles) and native trees. The solitary island to the north east is historic **Isle Maree**, associated with 8th-century St Maelrubha himself.

The line of hills above the further shore marks the southern boundary of the “Great Wilderness” (p25): **Beinn Airigh Charr^c** (791m), best seen and climbed from Poolewe; **Meall Mheinnidh^c** (722m); **Beinn Lair^c** (859m), misleadingly bland as its other side is a 3-mile line of cliffs; and the formidable tower of **Slioch^m** (981m), p17.

5 To Talladale

9 miles

The **Loch Maree Hotel** (built 1872) was recently renovated and reopened, and provides meals for non-residents (01445 760288). It was originally a fishermen’s hotel for salmon and sea trout, but in recent years the fishing has declined. **Boat Trips to Isle Maree** are offered: phone booking essential. Over the road in the trees is another hotel, **Old Mill Highland Lodge Hotel**: meals (01445 760271).

Talladale Falls Walk. Very rough walking (not recommended!) on the east side of the Talladale River, easier higher, takes you to the best waterfall in the area. (3km one way)

6 To Loch Maree Car Park

11½ miles

The road from Talladale passes through Torridonian Sandstone scenery of crags and boulders. A large car park half way along **Loch Maree** (left by the road builders) gives a chance to admire the loch and visit its shore, and to take pictures of Slioch.

Lochside and Old Road. From the car park, you can walk SE along the pathless loch shore, most easily by using rock slabs and boulders. There are several small beaches. When you reach the boats, take the track up to the A832, go across the road and up to the old single-track road. This gives an easy walk back. Traces of the original unfinished military road of 1763 (Major Caulfield) can be seen above. (4km)

7 To Grudie

13 miles

Grudie Bridge crosses the River Grudie among pine trees; the old single track bridge has been left intact beside the new one. There is a good view of Slioch, and up Glen Grudie of Beinn Eithe summit. The best parking is before Grudie, 200m before the new tree plantation on an obvious stretch of the old road on the right.

Glen Grudie. Walk past the plantation and, left of the house, find a small restored stalkers’ path leading up the glen. It eventually stops at the burn which comes from Coire mhic Fhearchair (p18), a remote spot. (6km one way) It involves a few burn crossings, especially Allt Coire Bhriste which may be difficult in spate; in such conditions an alternative return is to follow this burn down to the River Grudie dam and follow the hydro track down past the power station. (6km circuit)

Beinn a’ Chearcaill^c (725m). This hill is a broad rising wedge of sandstone whose unique summit is a fine viewpoint. Access is by a small path leaving the main path at 953 661 and rising to the head of Coire Bhriste. Many routes to the top are possible.

Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve

Beinn Eighe (*benay*) was the first **National Nature Reserve** (NNR) in Britain, set up in 1951 for its outstanding mountain, pinewood and lochside scenery, and its wildlife, plants and geology; and the **Loch Maree Islands**. It covers 48 sq kms.

8 Beinn Eighe NNR Woodland and Mountain Trails

16 miles

Here the **Glas Leitir** car park beside Loch Maree is the starting point for two trails. They pass under the road, then divide: straight on for the long Mountain Trail, right over a bridge for the Woodland Trail. Descriptive leaflets are available and recommended.

(1) Woodland Trail. This circular walk (clockwise) climbs 100m on a relatively easy path, and is an ideal introduction to the Nature Reserve. (1.5km, allow 1 hour)

(2) Mountain Trail. This unique route (clockwise) takes walkers up to 550m, into a high mountain environment, and requires fitness and surefootedness. Make sure you are suitably clothed and equipped, and allow plenty of time. Geology is the main theme; much of the walk is on Cambrian Quartzite. (6km, allow 4 hours)



The top of the Mountain Trail

At Taagan there is a NNR campsite: free, basic, tents only, short stay.

Meall a' Ghiuthais^c (887m) (*miowl a yoo-ish*) is climbed from the Mountain Trail by its SE slopes.

9 Beinn Eighe NNR Visitor Centre

17½ miles

Open Easter to October 10-5, with displays about the NNR and wildlife.

(3) Short trails have been laid out here, including the 1600m **Buzzard Trail**. There is also access to longer walks using paths and tracks on the **lower slopes of Beinn Eighe**. A circuit can be made by linking these paths: see the map opposite. (8km)

10 Kinlochewe

18 miles

The village of Kinlochewe ("Head of Loch Ewe", named when Loch Maree was still called the freshwater or inner Loch Ewe) lies at the foot of Glen Docherty, gateway to Wester Ross, and at the junction with the road to Torridon.

- Filling Station + small shop:** M-Sa 8.30-6, Su 9-5 (NB **Sunday fuel**); + **Typsy Laird Cafe:** W-Su 10-4.
- Caravan Club Site:** caravans and campervans (01445 760239).
- Village Store:** M-F 9-5.30, SaSu 9-1 (01445 760252): claims to be the only shop on the Cape Wrath Trail (some outdoor gear & meals); + **Post Office:** M-Sa 9-11; + **Painted Horse Antiques:** Tu-Sa 9.30-12.30.
- Kinlochewe Hotel:** meals and bar (01445 760253). An 1800 coaching inn. **Bunkhouse** attached.
- Whistle Stop Cafe:** all meals and snacks all day, byob: M-Sa 9-9 (01445 760423).
- Village Hall.**

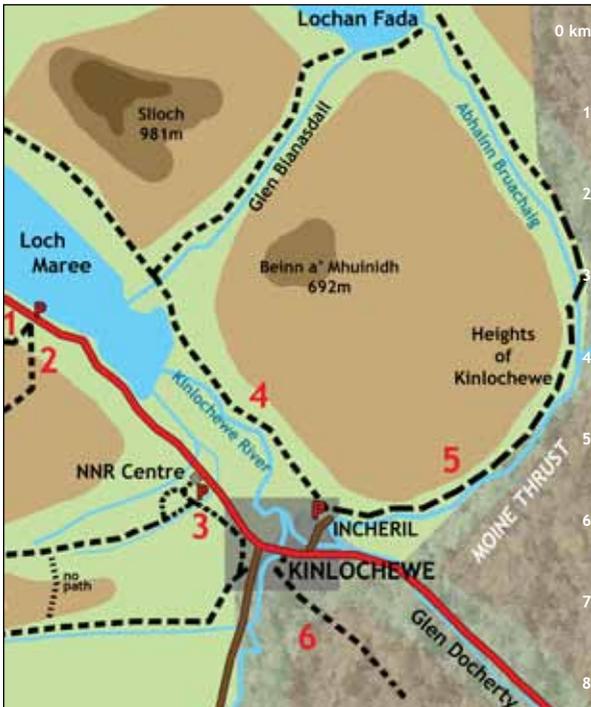


There is direct access to the Beinn Eighe NNR path system from south of the Hall.

Beyond Kinlochewe, **Glen Docherty** penetrates the Moine Thrust along the line of the Loch Maree Fault and a glacier, and makes a worthy approach to the rugged scenery of Wester Ross.

Torrordon is 10 miles south on the A896: see next page.

Achnasheen:	10 miles
Garve:	26 miles
Inverness:	50 miles



Slioch^M (981m), is climbed from Incheril car park near Kinlochewe using path (4) below. Access is by the large corrie which eats into it above Glen Bianasdail; this makes it easier than expected to reach the top.

Beinn a' Mhuinidh^G (692m) is the highest point on a large sloping plateau which is surprisingly hard to reach; the only obvious weakness in its south west face is the burn Allt Chnaimhean. Note the 100m waterfall (occasional) near the north end of the face. The rock layers are upside down thanks to the Moine Thrust.

Beinn Eighe east. This end of Beinn Eighe can be reached by the paths from the NNR Visitor Centre (9 opposite), or from Kinlochewe, or from Cromasaig on the Torrordon road. The tricky "Black Carls" pinnacles can be seen from Kinlochewe.

Walks around Kinlochewe

(1-3) Beinn Eighe NNR trails: see opposite.

(4) Incheril to Loch Maree. The minor road to Incheril starts just east of Kinlochewe, and leads to a walkers' car park. From here there is a pleasant walk to Loch Maree (if in doubt, keep right). (4.5km one way) This path can take you on as far as Poolewe (OS map needed): once it reaches Letterewe, it leaves the loch and climbs north (the direct loch-side route is blocked by the Bull Rock) and circles Beinn Airigh Charr to reach Kernsary (p23). This was the main route west before the A832 was built in 1849. (31km)

(5) Incheril to Lochan Fada. From Incheril car park (above) you can follow the river east (Abhainn Bruachaig) past the settlement at Heights of Kinlochewe. When the track turns into two footpaths, keep left to the remote oddly named Lochan Fada (*loch* = small loch!). If the two bridge-less river crossings are possible (unusually this loch has two outlets), you can complete a long circuit using Gleann Bianasdail. (22km)

(6) Above Glen Docherty. From Kinlochewe Bridge you can skirt the plantation and follow a rough path and then open slopes to Bidein Clann Raonaid (466m) for good views of the Torrordon Hills and wireless masts. (5km one way) A complete circuit of Glen Docherty from here involves some fence-crossing and a steep descent at the end.

A896: Kinlochewe to Torridon

Although this is an A-road, it is single-track as far as Loch Torridon. For four miles it runs at the foot of Beinn Eighe, and then it starts the gradual descent down **Glen Torridon**. In 1962 W.H. Murray published his influential book "Highland Landscape", a survey of 21 areas of outstanding natural beauty in Scotland. He wrote:

"Glen Torridon, its loch, and the mountains to either side, exhibit more of mountain beauty than any other district in Scotland."

1 To Loch Clair

After you leave Kinlochewe, there are good views of **Beinn Eighe** (1010m, p21) on the right, with its slopes of quartzite scree and sharp ridge. **Cromasaig Croft** sells fresh produce (01445 760234). After 3 miles a private road goes left down to **Loch Clair**. There is parking at the junction, and it is worth walking down to the loch for a view of the pine woods and the mountain **Liathach**.

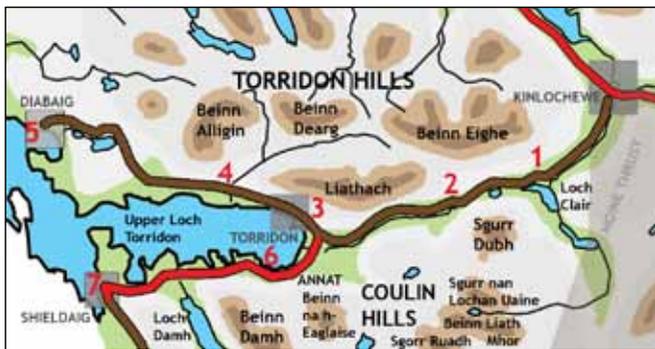
Two Lochs Walk. Follow the track along Loch Clair, and then Loch Coulin. The track climbs into forestry, but you can instead follow the footpath along the loch to its head and re-join the track; on your way you cross the **Moine Thrust** (p36). Return along the south side of Loch Coulin to Coulin Lodge, then over the bridge to rejoin the track back to the road. (10km)

2 To Coire Dubh car park

A little further on, the view of **Liathach** (1055m, p21) (*lee-agach*) suddenly appears; to your left is **Sgurr Dubh** (782m), the first of the Coulin hills (*cow-lin*). You reach a large car park to your right, at the foot of **Coire Dubh** (*corri doo*), not really a corrie but a glen, the pass between Liathach and Beinn Eighe. To the south is the well-known **Valley of a Hundred Hills**, an unusual area of hummocky glacial moraines. Three walks:

(1) **Coire Mhic Fhearchair** (*corri veek errachar*). The obvious, good path north climbs up Coire Dubh and then (keep right) circles the end of Beinn Eighe, climbing to reach this corrie, perhaps the finest in Scotland. The 350m-high Triple Buttress (sandstone below, quartzite above) and the wall to its left are well known to rock climbers. To the right of it are the scattered remains of a RAF Lancaster bomber which crashed in March 1951 (and ensured that threatened RAF mountain rescue teams were maintained). (6km one-way)

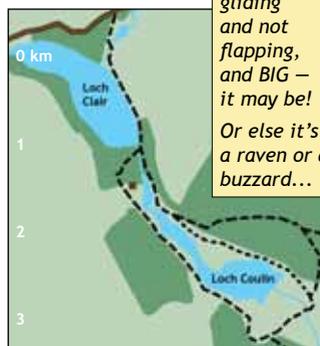
(2) **Round Liathach.** If you can arrange transport and the weather is good, you can turn left at the top of Coire Dubh and follow a path round the "back" of Liathach to Coire mhic Nobuill and the Beinn Alligin car park in the woods above Torridon House. (12km)



Is it an eagle?

If it is high, gliding and not flapping, and BIG – it may be!

Or else it's a raven or a buzzard...



6 miles

(3) **The Hundred Hills.** Cross back over the road bridge and step over the crash barrier on to a small but good path south which takes you past the Ling Hut (Scottish Mountaineering Club) and then up-river, skirting the hundred hills; there are several burn crossings. If you like rough walking, you can turn left and explore some of the hundred.

3 To Torridon Village

10 miles

The road continues along **Glen Torridon** under the awesome slopes of Liathach, a series of Torridonian Sandstone terraces; the summit is a vertical kilometre above you. Pass lonely Glen Cottage and turn right at the road junction near the head of Loch Torridon, where the village of **TORRIDON** begins (the main road goes along the south shore of the loch: see the next page). Here there is the **National Trust for Scotland Countryside Centre** (Su-F 10-5); the Torridon Estate was acquired by the NTS in 1967. A sign points to the **Deer Museum** and **Wildlife Hide** and to a path which follows the



Torridon Village is dwarfed by the western slopes of Liathach

shore to Torridon village and Am Ploc (below) (1.8km one way). Two other walks are indicated on a map, each visiting nearby clearance townships.

Torridon village runs along the road for the first mile from the junction:

- **Youth Hostel** and free **Campsite** (tents only) with Public Toilets.
- **Community Centre:** Exhibitions, crafts, etc. M-Sa 10-4 (01445 791361), website.
- **Medical Centre:** MTWF 9-1,2-5 (01445 791223); next to the Community Centre.
- **Torridon Stores + Cafe:** M-Sa 10-5 (01445 791400).

Walk from the shop: Am Ploc peninsula. On the left is an Open Air Church, used until the 1960s. On the right in the sea is a good example of a fish trap (p35).

4 To Beinn Alligin car park : North Loch Torridon road

12 miles

Beyond the village the narrow road hugs the shore, with views across the loch to the hills of Coulin and Bendamph estates. Then it climbs with two hairpin bends into pine woods. At a road bridge over a gorge you reach the large **Coire Mhic Nobuill** car park, mainly used by those climbing **Beinn Alligin** (p21). This is another glen disguised as a corrie.

Coire mhic Nobuill. Back over the bridge, a good path north leads through the woods and on up the river. It is worth continuing at least as far as the footbridge. Return the same way. (2km one way) For the circuit of Liathach see opposite.

5 To Diabaig

19 miles

The road continues high above the shore, with the houses of **INVERALLIGIN** and then **WESTER ALLIGIN** below, and climbs up and over a rugged area of Lewisian Gneiss past a **Viewpoint**. It drops down to two lochs, and finally steeply down to the end of the road at **DIABAIG** (Norse *djup-vik*, deep bay) where there is parking near the pier. Diabaig makes a fitting end to the drive. There is walking in the Gneiss area south of Diabaig, for example on a path which follows the coast round to Wester Alligin: OS Explorer map 433. **Gille Brighde Cafe/Restaurant:** sea food, local produce, website: book at 01445 790245.

South Loch Torridon Road

This road was opened as recently as 1963; before that there was only a private track.

6 To Torridon Hotel and Inn

1½ miles from Torridon junction

The road passes through ANNAT village (no services) to **The Torridon (Hotel)**, and its **Torridon Inn**: bar meals (01445 712254). A programme of outdoor activities is run here: www.thetorridon.com/activities. Two walks start here:

(1) **Loch an Eoin**. This lengthy walk, with one pathless section, is a circuit of Beinn na h-Eaglaise, and can be done in either direction. Anti-clockwise is advised in wet conditions in case you cannot cross the river. From the back of Torridon Inn follow signs to Beinn Damh; the path climbs to the main road. Across the road, find the start of the hill path which climbs through pine woods. Above the woods, ignore a path which turns right (to Beinn Damh) and continue a short way to where there used to be a bridge across the river; cross on rocks further upstream and return to the ex-bridge. The path is clear as far as the col between Beinn Damh and Beinn na h-Eaglaise: impressive views of Maol Chean-Dearg. Now walk due east across rough path-less ground to join another path. This passes Loch an Eoin and crosses a burn, then heads north, across the burn again, to traverse the slopes and finally descend to Annat. Walk back up the main road to the start. (13km)

(2) **South Loch Torridon**. From the Torridon Inn the old pre-1963 track follows the indented coast (with shellfish farms) as far as Balgy Bridge (5km). The first 2.5km are through forest, and after that a good circuit can be made round the Aird Mhor peninsula on a track and well-made paths (map advised). (8.5km circuit from Inn) A shorter approach is from West Lodge, 2 miles west of the Inn.

7 To Shieldaig

7 miles

The road passes several bumpy view points for Beinn Alligin and the west end of Liathach, and then descends to **Balgy Bridge**, from which you can walk to Loch Damh (1km). This guidebook ends at the village of **SHIELDAIG** (not to be confused with its Gairloch namesake). **Loch Torridon Smokehouse** (M-Sa 10-5), **Nanny's Cafe and Gifts** (7 days 10-5), **Shieldaig Bar & Coastal Kitchen** (01520 755251), **Tigh an Eilean Hotel** (01520 755251 & website), **Village Store**, **Torridon Sea Tours** (01520 755353 & website), **Shieldaig Outdoor Activities** (hill-walking, kayaking etc: 01520 755369 & website).

Hills of Ben-Damph and Coulin Estates

- **Beinn Damh^c** (903m) (*dav*). See Walk (1) above for the start. The right-hand path leads up into the corrie and on to the ridge above, and the ridge is followed from there.
- **Beinn na h-Eaglaise^c** (736m) (*heglish*). Climbed from the paths used in walk (1) above.
- **Maol Chean-Dearg^m** (933m). Difficult from this side: usually climbed from Strathcarron.
- **Sgorr Ruadh^m** (962m). (*scorr rooa*) From the Coire Dubh car park (p18) the Hundred Hills path is taken, and from its end the north ridge of this fine hill is reached (*above*).
- **Beinn Liath Mhor^m** (926m). As for Sgorr Ruadh, but turn left up the NW ridge.
- **Sgurr nan Lochan Uaine^c** (871m) and **Sgurr Dubh^c** (782m). Also climbed from the Coire Dubh car park. Rough walking, much of it on quartzite.



Torrordon Hills

Hills or Mountains? The tradition in Scotland has been to call every summit a "hill", but don't be misled: these are mountains!

This mountain group joins Glencoe, the Cairngorms and the Skye Cuillin in the list of the finest in Scotland. The Torrordon hills are not easy: all involve some rock scrambling.

- **Beinn Eighe^{MM}** (1010m). A spectacular 5-mile ridge coated with quartzite. Access: via Coire Mhic Fhearchair (p18) for the west end, a path starting at a small wood for the centre, NNR paths for the east.
- **Liathach^{MM}** (1055m). The top-rated Scottish hill among Munroists. A path up to the east end starts near Glen Cottage. Two Munros and the Am Fasarinen pinnacle ridge.
- **Beinn Alligin^{MM}** (986m). A beautiful hill and superb viewpoint; a circular walk from the car park (p19). Note the Horns pinnacle ridge and the Eag Dhuibh (Black Cleft).
- **Beinn Dearg^C** (914m). Steep-sided, most easily taken from the east via Coire Dubh.

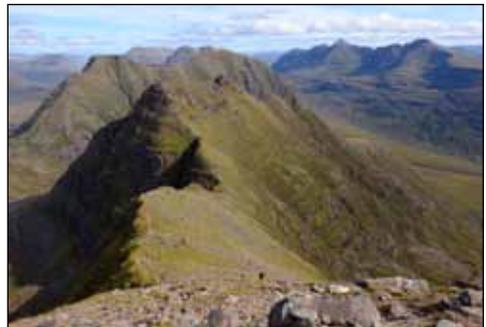
Beinn Eighe



Liathach



Beinn Alligin



A832 NORTH : Gairloch to Dundonnell



The A832 north from Gairloch, another highly scenic drive, links a series of four sea lochs, circling the area which has come to be known as “The Great Wilderness”. The road was built in stages: to Poolewe by 1830, but later realigned; to Aultbea in 1849, a Destitution Road; and from Aultbea by various landowners, with Gruinard River not bridged until the early 1900s.

1 To Poolewe

5½ miles from Achtercairn

After climbing Achtercairn Brae (viewpoint car park at the top), the road passes a 19th-century plantation which conceals a Quarry, and the Recycling Centre (M-F 9-12, 12.30-4). Beyond the wood there is good rough walking in the Gneiss hills north (easier) and south of the road. The road climbs to a pass and then skirts Loch Tollaich (or Tollie), with fine Gneiss scenery beyond it: the “Tollie Antiform” (rock climbing).

A small unsigned car park on the right about 1km after the loch gives access to walking; map opposite; there is also parking further down the hill at a good viewpoint.

(1) Tollie to Slattadale Walk (p14 for the other end). The path climbs to the right of the impressive Creag Mhor Thollaidh (Tollie Rock) and descends to Loch Maree. (9km)

(2) Cliff Hill. North of the road a rocky ridge overlooks Poolewe, with wireless masts on its summit (229m); it can be climbed directly from the above car park, or from further west along the road. Panoramic views of Loch Ewe, Loch Maree and beyond.

A little further on, a small road turns sharp right; it descends to Tollie Farm and ends at Tollie Bay on Loch Maree. (3) Rough exploratory woodland walking is possible from here alongside Loch Maree in either direction. (Tollie Rock has some serious rock climbs.)

The main road descends to the River Ewe, only a mile long, and so to POOLEWE. The water supply for the Gairloch/Poolewe area is taken from this end of Loch Maree.

Poolewe Bridge: first built in 1844 and replaced in 1939.

Londubh Burial Ground: Ancient Monument, **Guidebook** available. It includes a Pictish stone and a ruined chapel (c1672).

The **Old Church** is by Thomas Telford, 1828.

1 Store and Post Office: M-Sa 9-6; PO MTuThF 9-1, 2-5.30; W 9-1; Sa 9-12.30.

Fishing permits.

2 Shops: downstairs Button Bothy gifts; upstairs Second-hand Books: M-F 11-4.

1 Bridge Cottage Cafe and Gallery/Gift Shop: 10.30-5 exc W (01445 781335).

2 Poolewe Hotel: an old coaching inn: meals & bar (01445 781769).

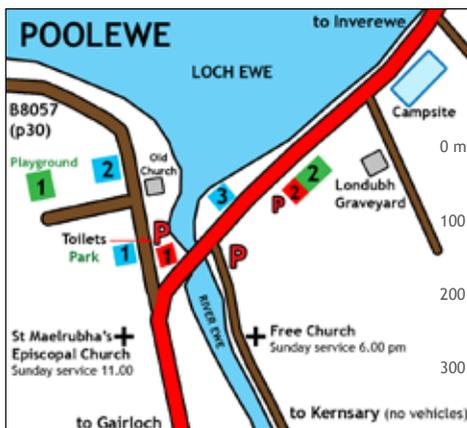
3 Pool House Hotel: 5* hotel, not open to non-residents.

1 Swimming Pool: 15m x 6m. 01445 781345 or **Gairloch Times** for opening times.

2 Village Hall: regular Tuesday markets, Wednesday ceilidhs, etc.

Canoeing: Ewe Canoe. Equipment & instruction (07980 588467), www.ewecanoe.co.uk

Campsite: tents, caravans etc (01445 781249).



Walks around Poolewe

(4) Kersary Circuit. A popular walk. From Poolewe bridge east follow the river on a tarred road at first. The **Red Smiddy**, on a flat area beside the river where it turns into Loch Maree, is a 17th-century iron blast furnace: you can see part of the furnace, and traces of the channel which brought water to a wheel which worked the bellows (p35). Continue through Inveran woods and on to Kersary Farm. Beyond the gate, follow the fence downhill to a footbridge; cross a field uphill to find the footpath which takes you back to Poolewe, reaching the road on part of the Inverewe trail. (11km)

(5) To Ardlair (Loch Maree). An extension of the above. Beyond a lochan after the stile, a small path turns right: a rough, sometimes wet, shortcut. Otherwise turn right at the bridge before Kersary, and on by the main track.



the track descends to the modern house Ardlair; turn right here to reach the tree-lined shore of Loch Maree, and follow it as far as you like. (8km one way)

(6) To Fionn Loch. Go to Kersary, and on by the main track. Turn left at the wood. After an area called Bad Bog (! = boggy place) the track reaches the loch. (10km one way) A 2.5km walk north links to the track to Drumchork (p27). (21km)

(7) Into the Great Wilderness. Access to the interior, and to the nearby Beinn Airigh Charr.

(8) Inverewe Trails. See next page.

Inverewe Garden

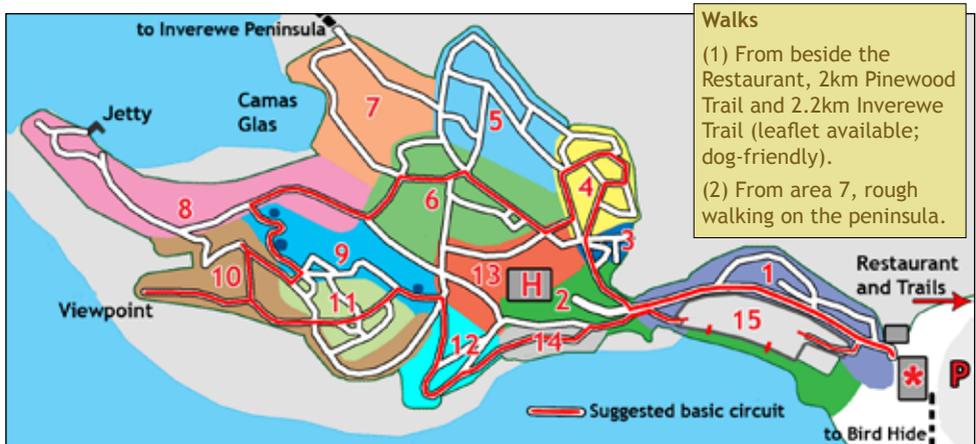
Just north of Poolewe is the most popular visitor attraction in Wester Ross: not to be missed.

* **Visitor Centre, Gift Shop:** Apr-Oct opening times vary, from 10-4 to 9.30-6; Nov-Mar entrance by side door, 10-3. **Osgood's Cafe** beside the car park: Apr-Oct, 10.30-4.

H Inverewe House has displays, exhibitions, cafe, toilets.

The Garden has belonged to the National Trust for Scotland since 1952 when it was presented to them by Mairi Sawyer, daughter of the garden's original creator, along with the whole estate. Osgood Mackenzie (1842-1922), youngest son of the laird of Gairloch, acquired the 12,000 acre Inverewe Estate in 1862-3. He built the original House (burnt down in 1914, replaced 1937) and the Walled Garden, and started planting trees so that he could develop a garden on the land west of the house. This was ambitious, as only two dwarf willows were growing in the shallow peaty soil, but remarkably successful: within his lifetime the garden became famous for its exotic plant collection. The garden has continued to develop since then in the care of his daughter and now the NTS. The estate beyond is managed for conservation.

Most of Inverewe is a woodland garden, threaded by a maze of paths. The map below divides it somewhat artificially into sections, some of which are named on garden signs. A basic suggested circuit is shown (but not signposted!). Allow at least two hours to explore the garden thoroughly. **Guidebook** etc available; guided walks at 1.30 on weekdays.



- 1 **Drive and surroundings.** Eucalyptus trees, Azaleas, Olearia etc. Views of Walled Garden.
- 2 **House and surroundings.** Lawns, herbaceous border, variegated oak etc.
- 3 **America.** Small varied area of flower beds and small shrubs.
- 4 **Bambooselem.** Big trees, many exotic plants, famous *Magnolia campbellii*, Wollemi pines.
- 5 **High paths** (Coronation Knoll and Jubilee Walk). Rhododendrons, heaths etc.
- 6 **Rhododendron Walk** etc. One of the first parts of the garden.
- 7 **Camas Glas (Grey Bay).** Giant *Gunnera* clumps, a rough walk by the sea.
- 8 **Jetty Path.** Jetty used by cruise visitors, Cuddy Rock beyond, heronry in trees.
- 9 **Pond Gardens and Wet Valley.** Luxuriant growth around three ponds.
- 10 **Viewpoint.** Paths (incl. steep Devil's Elbow) leading to a clifftop view across Loch Ewe.
- 11 **Niveum Walk** etc. A maze of small paths.
- 12 **Japan.** Exotic tree ferns, palm etc.
- 13 **Big Trees.** Including Douglas fir, European silver fir, giant redwoods (about 135 years old).
- 14 **Rock Garden.** Leading down to the sea; wonderful *Eucalyptus coccifera*.
- 15 **Walled Garden & South Africa.** Worth taking your time. Gates lead to grass beside shore.

The Great Wilderness

The inland area between Loch Maree and Little Loch Broom, more properly called Letterewe and Fisherfield Forests, is a famously remote, spectacular and rugged region of mountains, cliffs and lochs. It contains the remotest point in Britain (*) according to the Ordnance Survey (NH 02020 77000), and the remotest Munro. Access paths (—) start at Kinlochewe, Poolewe (easiest), Gruinard River, or Dundonnell — but it's a long walk from anywhere. There are useful open bothies at Carnmore (B1) and Shenavall (B2); otherwise a tent is needed. Of course, this area is not for the faint-hearted, inexperienced or unfit.



The hills in this area all require considerable effort, but in good weather the rewards are great; e.g. the Maiden is perhaps the best mountain viewpoint in Scotland.

- 1 Beinn a' Chaisgein Beag^c (680m)
- 2 Beinn a' Chaisgein Mor^c (854m)
- 3 A' Mhaighdean^m (967m) : "the Maiden"
- 4 Ruadh Stac Mor^m (918m)
- 5 Beinn Dearg Mor^c (910m)
- 6 Beinn Dearg Beag^c (818m)
- 7 Beinn a' Chlaidheimh^c (913m)
- 8 Sgurr Ban^m (989m)
- 9 Mullach Coire Mhic Fhearchair^m (1019m)
- 10 Beinn Tarsuinn^m (937m)

For the **other** hills, see pages 15 and 29.

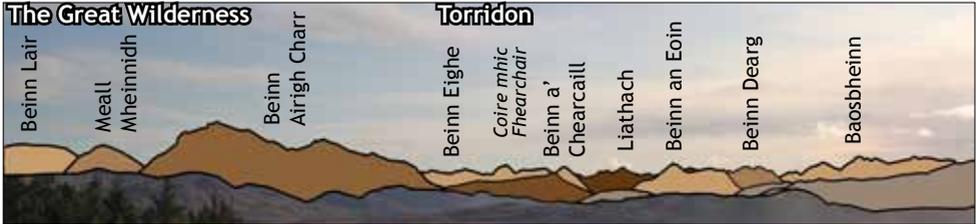
From Loch Ewe west (p30)



2 To Aultbea

12 miles

After Inverewe the next inhabited area is wooded **Tournaig** beside Loch nan Dailthean. **Garden Cottage Nursery** sells a wide range of plants: M-Sa 10-6 (01445 781777). Second World War structures include a water tank and anti-aircraft gun positions. For the story of the **First World War** here, see Pauline Butler's booklet. The road (a Destitution Road, 1850: p35) now climbs for a winding traverse of the steep slopes above the loch. There is a **viewpoint** at each end of this traverse. The first gives a fine panorama:



The second viewpoint, opposite the **Isle of Ewe**, tells the story of Loch Ewe in the Second World War, when it was a naval base. Below is a NATO ship refuelling jetty; its oil tanks are inland to the north east.

See page 31 for more details of **Wartime Loch Ewe**. You may already have noticed the concrete bases of wartime buildings around the loch. There are information signs in several places, and there are plans to develop this theme further.

After a sharp bend in the road, you approach the village of **AULTBEA**, another former crofting township, influenced by wartime and post-war developments. Linked to it along the shore are the townships of Bualnaluib, Ormiscaig and Mellon Charles. The total population is about 450.

Loch Ewe Distillery at Drumchork Lodge Hotel claims to be Scotland's smallest, and the only one using the methods of the old illicit stills.

Clapper Bridge. This is thought to be the best Scottish example of this old type of bridge. It used to carry the main road, and was probably built in the early 1800s.

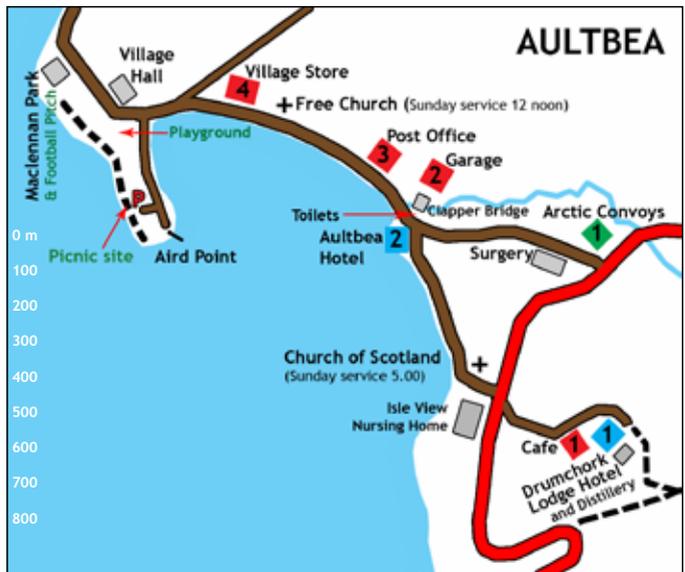
Village Hall. This used to be a wartime military dance-hall. There are plans to replace it.

Playground opposite.

Maclennan Park.

Information signs about Wartime Loch Ewe (p31), anti-aircraft gun pits, and a path to Aird Point picnic site and car park; football pitch.

Surgery. M-F 9-11, MWF 3-4.15, Th 4.30-6.30 (01445 731221).



- 1 **Cafe and Gift Shop:** Oran-Na-Mara: M-Sa 9.30-4.30 (01445 731394).
- 2 **Garage:** Alex Forbes, with **vehicle recovery service** (01445 731200).
- 3 **Post Office:** + stationery: M-Th 9-1,2-5.30; F 9-1, Sa 9-12.30.
- 4 **Aultbea Store:** Food and general: M-F 8.30-6, Sa 8.30-5.30 (01445 731203).
- 1 **Drumchork Lodge Hotel:** Meals, whiskies, Loch Ewe Distillery (01445 731242).
- 2 **Aultbea Hotel:** Restaurant, Bistro/Bar: meals 12-2, 6-8 (01445 731201).
- 1 **Aultbea Exhibition Centre:** Russian Arctic Convoys displays & **gift shop:** 9.30-4.30.

Fionn Loch Walk. From the sharp bend or Drumchork Hotel (parking), an old track leads to Fionn Loch. Near the start below the bridge over Allt Beithe an old fish ladder is worth visiting. (8.5km one way) 1km north along Fionn Loch shore is the track leading to near Gruinard (p28) (=17km); 2.5km south is the track to Poolewe (p23) (=21km). Map p22.

The Aultbea shore road continues via **BUALNALUIB** to **ORMISCAIG**, where the **Isle Of Ewe Smokehouse** welcomes visitors and shoppers: M-F 9-5.30 (01445 731304).

Next is **MELLON CHARLES**. 3 miles from the A832 a left turn takes you to a loch, a cemetery (parking), good inland views, and the remains of the **wartime Boom base** (foot access currently allowed). NW Highlands **Snorkel Trail site 7** is here. Near the road end (3.4 miles), there is parking at:

The Perfume Studio and Gift Shop / The Image Studio / The Aroma Cafe, all in one building. The Perfume Studio makes perfumes, toiletries, soap etc. The Image Studio offers photographic courses and excursions. The Aroma Cafe serves coffees/teas, hot and cold food, home-made cakes etc. Tu-Su 10-5 (01445 731618).

Coastal Walk. From the road end follow a track uphill to avoid cliffs, then watch for a rough path left back to the coast. You can follow the coast to Slaggan Bay (p32). (3km)

3 To Laide

14 miles

A short drive takes you to Laide, passing **Laide Community Woodland** on the right (parking with 2.1 metre height barrier). This was bought from the Forestry Commission in 2005 and is being carefully managed to enhance biodiversity and encourage recreational use. Special events are arranged. The Old Butts were part of a shooting range originally used for Territorial Army practice.



LAIDE village has views across Gruinard Bay and to the hills north of Ullapool; the furthest which can be seen is Foinaven, 60 miles away. The population around Gruinard Bay is about 200. A minor road goes north to **Mellon Udrigle and Opinan**; for this and **Chapel of Sand** see p32.

Village Store, Post Office, Filling Station: M-Sa 9-5.30. PO MTuThF 9-1,2-5.30; W 9-1; Sa 9-12.30 (01445 731252). **Fishing permits for Aultbea Estate.**

Gruinard Bay Caravan Park: caravans and camping (01445 731225).

4 To Gruinard Beach

18 miles

The road dips to a sharp bend, then climbs to follow the shore line. The largest parking area here gives access to the shore; if the offshore rocks are showing, check for seals. If you walk back 75m, a wooden post marks a path down to an interesting hidden bit of shore with rock stacks, a tunnel, and a cave (Uamh na Pollachar) with a walled entrance which was once used as a church (compare Cove, p31).

The road goes through two settlements with the bureaucratic-sounding names **FIRST COAST** and **SECOND COAST**. These originated as clearance settlements.

Clearances. The first settlements here date from about 1800 when the landowner (Davidson of Tulloch) and his tenant (Macintyre), who wanted to set up a sheep farm, evicted all the people who lived in the fertile land up Gruinard River and settled them here on the poor coastal land. The “Coast” names were presumably given by the estate factor; there was once a Third Coast also. In 1835 Gruinard Estate was bought by Meyrick Bankes, a wealthy English landowner who became notorious. He continued the process of clearance, and even evicted for a second time the people of the Coasts; no doubt many of them went overseas.

Next the road climbs into an area of Gneiss hills. A track right is the shortest route (7.5km) to Fionn Loch, and can be linked with the other two routes (p27). At the top of **Gruinard Hill** a small lay-by gives a sudden chance to view the beach and the rocky hills beyond, and above them the mountain **An Teallach**. Down the hill you cross **Little Gruinard River** and then **Inverianvie River**. A popular car park gives access to **Gruinard BEACH**. Here, if the tide is right, you can walk more than 1km north along the sand. NW Highlands **Snorkel Trail site 6** is here.

Walks. Rough footpaths lead up each of the rivers into the Gneiss country: the west side of Little Gruinard and the **difficult** east side of Inverianvie (OS Explorer map 435).

5 To Badcaul

24 miles

It is a short distance to **Gruinard River**. This larger river was not bridged until about 1910; before that the crossing was by ford or ferry a little upstream. You can also reach Gruinard Beach from this area, although the roadside parking is very limited. **The Gneiss crags around here are popular with rock-climbers.**

Gruinard River Walk. A good track follows the river all the way to Loch na Sealga. (8.5km one way) For a shorter walk, a good circuit with rough off-path walking, park back at the main beach and follow the tricky Inverianvie River path for about 2km, then cut left over the hill to Gruinard River; if the tide is out, return along the beach. (10km)

At the mouth of the river is **Gruinard House**, whose fine garden is open occasionally. Next is **Mungasdale**, and another **BEACH**: park at a lay-by opposite **Gruinard Island** (below) and walk on along the road to find beach access through a gate in the fence.

Stattic Point Walk. From Mungasdale beach follow a farm field wall and then continue along the coast to the Point (pathless). Just before you reach it, some craggy sandstone rocks by the shore show grey blotches and are evidence of a huge meteorite 1200 million years ago (web search “Torridonian Stoer Group Stac Fada member”). You can return over the hills of the peninsula; on the south side of the second one (**NB cliff!**) is another interesting sandstone feature. Descend before the fields. (7.5km)

Gruinard Island. In 1941-2, to study the threat of new biological weapons which the enemy might develop, scientists from Porton Down carried out a series of experiments with Anthrax on this island, chosen for its remoteness (?). First they exploded a canister of it: the sheep used for the trial died. Further tests included the dropping of an Anthrax bomb. The island remained closed until 1990, when after a major clean-up operation it was declared safe.

The road climbs a long hill, with a large viewpoint car park at the top, before descending to **Little Loch Broom** and the village of **BADCAUL**, on a side-road to the left. There is a **Church of Scotland** (services 2nd and 4th Sundays of month 12.15) and a Primary School. **Northern Lights Campsite** (01697 371379) is on the main road.

The side-road continues to the crofting townships of **DURNAMUCK** and **BADLUARACH**, whence inhabitants of Scoraig can cross the loch by an on-demand boat.



6 To Dundonnell (Corriehallie)

31 miles

Next come three small settlements along the loch. **Beware feral goats** on the road (they have little road sense!); and watch for whales and dolphins in the loch.

BADBEA is first. Next is **ARDESSIE** with a fish farm and **Ardessie Burn**. Park below new waterworks and walk on to the road bridge. The waterfall here is the first of many on this exceptionally fine burn. To explore the waterfalls, scramble up either bank keeping as close to the burn as possible; if possible cross and return down the other bank. Higher up the hill there is a deep gorge with a series of bigger falls.

CAMUSNAGAUL has **Sail Mhor Croft Hostel** (01854 633224).

NW Highlands **Snorkel Trail site 5** is below.

Where the loch ends in salt marshes **DUNDONNELL** begins with the well-known **Dundonnell Hotel**: meals in the hotel or Broombeg Bar (01854 633204). After another 2 miles a small road turns left to **Badrallach** (p33). 44 Red Squirrels were released here in 2008 and have spread around the area; there are now over 300: watch out for them crossing the road.

There is roadside car parking (often full) just beyond at Corriehallie, where a track starts south for climbers heading for **An Teallach** or walkers going in to Shenavall bothy and the Great Wilderness (p25). A walk up the track to its highest point is worthwhile.

The road crosses the Moine Thrust at this point and climbs up into the Moine Schist past cliffs and waterfalls. As an approach to Wester Ross, this road is the match of Glen Docherty above Loch Maree.

to Braemore: 8 miles
to Ullapool: 20 miles
to Inverness: 52 miles



An Teallach^{MM} (1062m) (*an tchell-akh*). This magnificent and difficult mountain, judged by many to be the best in Scotland (see also Liathach, p21!), has two main approach routes: (1) to the summit, a path from just east of Dundonnell Hotel; (2) the Corriehallie track, used for a full circuit of the tops.

Sail Mhor^C (767m), aka the Plum Pudding, is a conspicuous outlier of An Teallach above Ardessie Burn; the easiest route leaves the burn to circle round to the south ridge.

B8057: Poolewe to Cove

This single-track Destitution (p35) road follows the west coast of Loch Ewe through former crofting townships. There are many signs of the naval presence here in the 2nd World War (see opposite). The population of Poolewe and west Loch Ewe is about 410.

1 To Naast 2½ miles from Poolewe

From Poolewe the road circles the raised beach to meet the escarpment which was created by the Loch Maree Fault (p36). If you park here at the first cattle-grid (don't block it) you can walk on to **Boor Burn**. The building is the power plant for a micro-hydro-electric scheme. A steep climb up a badly reinstated hydro track takes you into the small rough hills of the escarpment: Cliff Hill south, or Boor Hill north.

Continue to the settlement of **NAAST**. There is a small parking area here opposite a square house which started as a pumphouse for watering ships in wartime. Walks:

To Gairloch. From here an old cross-country path went to Gairloch; it has mostly disappeared, but much of the route is marked by posts. (7.5km)

Loch Christina. South of Naast, this loch is surrounded by small gneiss hills (seven?) which make a good rough circuit. Start from Naast, as there is no roadside parking. (5km)



2 To Inverasdale car park 4½ miles

After Naast the road soon leaves the escarpment and enters the long straggling township of **INVERASDALE** (the first part is properly called **MIDTOWN**). Just beyond the former **Free Church** there is a signed car park for walkers.

To Loch an Draing and Camas Mor. Follow a minor road from the church to its end, and cut left by gates and fields to an old and rather wet path which follows the foot of the escarpment. The second half passes woodland, lochs, and the deserted settlement of Lochdraing. (From near here a well-made track goes NE to the coast: *Cove 14km.*) The path reaches the coast at Camas Mor (p9) where there is a bothy. (10km one way)

3 To Firemore Beach 6 miles

Below the road you will see **Good For Ewe**, a community horticultural project. Next you pass the former **Inverasdale School**, now used by the community for exhibitions, and also housing the **Old Schoolhouse Tearoom** (WF 2-5). There are good views from the road of the hills of the Great Wilderness (p25). **FIREMORE** and its **BEACH** are reached, with **camping**; if there is no roadside space at the beach, drive on to a car park on the left. The wartime boom across the loch ended at the point south of the beach. In dry conditions you can walk SW via Loch Sguod to join the Camas Mor footpath (above): map needed.



4 To the road end

9 miles

The road winds through the final settlement, **COVE**, which has a small harbour (in a cove!). If you park at the hill-top beyond the harbour and walk on down the hill, a sign indicates “Cove Cave”: cross the field to a scenic bit of coast, and take with care a slippery route down right. The spacious cave was used as a church until 1843 (cf p28).

A car park below the end of the road is among wartime remains: the living quarters of the men who manned the coastal defence guns and searchlights on the headland above, Rubha nan Sasan. These were two 6-inch naval guns salvaged from HMS Iron Duke at Scapa Flow. Climb up the headland on a track from the road end; you can see the gun and searchlight emplacements, and at the top there is a memorial, placed in 1999, to those who died in the Russian Arctic convoys which left Loch Ewe (picture below).

North Coast Walk. From the car park, go through a gate and across the salt marsh, and you can walk along the complex coastline on fairly easy ground. Opposite the largest island, Eilean Furadh Mor, there is a memorial to the Liberty ship which was wrecked here in 1944 (below). (2km one way) Beyond that, it is a long rough walk to Camas Mor.

SS William H Welch. On Saturday 26th February 1944, a convoy of ten ships was approaching Loch Ewe in a north-easterly storm, to join other ships en route to New York. The American Liberty Ship SS William H Welch missed the entry to the loch and was driven on to the west end of Eilean Furadh Mor. The crew of 74 could not take to the boats because of the high waves, and a tug failed to set up a tow. The ship broke in two, and the bow section ended up between the island and the mainland. The crew were washed overboard, and only 12 survived. A huge rescue effort involved crofters, coastguards, the Poolewe Fieldcraft Training Centre, the Navy, the YMCA, and lighthouse keepers. The survivors were taken to the hospital, Gairloch Hotel.

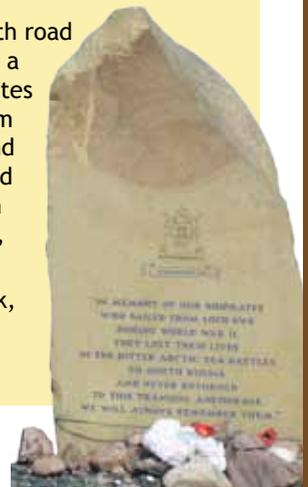
Wartime Loch Ewe

In 1939 Loch Ewe was considered as a back-up to Scapa Flow in Orkney as the main base for the Home Fleet, a role it had filled before 1916. After much discussion it was decided to use it as a temporary base while defences at Scapa Flow were improved. Loch Ewe’s vulnerability was demonstrated in December 1939 when the flagship HMS Nelson was damaged by hitting a mine (laid by a U-boat) as she entered the loch.

In 1941 Loch Ewe evolved into an assembly point for convoys (called HMS Helicon), and between February 1942 and December 1944 nineteen Russian Arctic convoys gathered here (before this they had started from Iceland).

The whole Gairloch/Loch Ewe area became a restricted area with road check-points, passes etc. Gairloch Hotel became a hospital, and a Fieldcraft Training Centre was set up in Poolewe. Anti-aircraft sites were built around the loch, barrage balloons were deployed from a base at Tournaig, coastal defence artillery was installed beyond Cove, along with look-out points and signal stations. An improved boom with anti-submarine net was installed from Rubh’ a’ Choin near the Mellon Charles base, via the small island Sgeir an Araig, to An Sguiteach point south of Firemore.

See the book *Loch Ewe during World War II* by Steven Chadwick, which also covers other wartime events in the area. There is an **Exhibition Centre** in Aultbea (p26-7), and there are information panels in Aultbea, Poolewe and elsewhere around the loch.



Laide to Opinan

1 To Slaggan car park

<2 miles from Laide

Take the side road north from Laide store (p27). A short way along it there is a lay-by on the right, and a gate 50m before it; through the gate, a track leads down to an old graveyard and the ruined, probably medieval, **Chapel of Sand** (explanatory sign).

When the road leaves the coast, on the right is a large house, **Udrigle House**; this A-listed building was originally the laird's house for Gruinard Estate, built 1745. On the left is the small settlement of **ACHGARVE**. Soon you come to the **Slaggan** turning; currently this road is, oddly, a public road, but only advised for 4-wheel-drives. Just beyond the turning on the right a quarry is used as a car park.

Slaggan Walk. The "road" gives easy walking. At the start, to the left are the ruins of a village, Altantarsin, which had 9 households in 1841 and none in 1851: probably it was "cleared". At the high point of the road, walls indicate former agriculture; there is a roundhouse on a small bluff overlooking the road. The road ends at another deserted village, Slaggan. In 1911 it had 31 inhabitants, but by 1940 only one house was being used, summer only; this is the prominent one, which burnt down mysteriously in 1943. Below is **Slaggan BEACH**. **NB Swimming is dangerous here because of currents.** (5km one way) From here you can follow the coast (no path) south to Mellon Charles (p27); or north to Greenstone Point (below), on to Opinan and back by the road for a 19km circuit.

2 To Mellon Udrigle beach

3 miles

On the left as you leave the Slaggan car park is **Loch na Beiste**. About 1840, the local people persuaded the laird, Meyrick Bankes, to put an end to the Beast (kelpie?) which lived here. Attempts to pump the loch dry failed, and so barrels of lime were poured into its deepest part. It is not known what happened to the Beast...

Pass the turning to Opinan, and reach **MELLON UDRIGLE** settlement and **BEACH** with car park and **camping** (Mellon is from Gaelic *meallan*, small hill; Udrigil is from Norse, outer gully). There are good views north. The headland right of the beach is worth visiting.

Coast Walk to Opinan. Walk north keeping close to the shore, with some good rock scenery, eventually reaching the estuary before Opinan with interesting settlement remains. Return by the road if you can reach it, or by an old track south. (c6km)

3 To Opinan

4½ miles

The side road before Mellon Udrigle beach goes to the straggling settlement of **OPINAN** (north). There is a turning circle at its end, and parking in a road quarry before that.

Greenstone Point walk. Follow the deeply indented coast north and west; the slabby Torridonian Sandstone and the many inlets give some of the best coastal exploration in the area: allow plenty of time, and look out for signs of otters. Greenstone Point itself is a lichen-covered tower. (3.5km+ one way) There is a good view NW of the northern hills:



Dundonnell to Badrallach

Take the small side road (NB **narrow**, and sometimes bumpy or steep) from Dundonnell/Corriehallie (p29) which quickly crosses Dundonnell River and reaches **Dundonnell House**, centre of a large estate; the very fine garden is open several times a year. The road continues along the pleasantly wooded Strath Beag, turning right near Eilean Darach house, centre of another estate; then it climbs out of the strath and traverses slopes to a sharp corner on a col. From the col a track descends to **Loch Broom** opposite Ullapool, to which there was once a ferry. For a view of Ullapool, park 350m before the bend in a quarry, and walk at least 1.5km down the track past Loch na h-Airbhe.

The road continues to Badrallach. **Kildonan** on a bay down to the left of the road is an important archaeological site, traditionally associated with St Donan (died 617AD); there is an old graveyard, a possible chapel, and an unusually well-preserved clearance village.

BADRALLACH (7 miles) has a **Bothy Cottage and Campsite** (01854 633281). The road ends after the houses with a small car park for people visiting **SCORAIG**.

Scoraig Walk. A good path leads along Little Loch Broom to the settlement of Scoraig. This former crofting area had been deserted when in the 1960s it was colonised by a group of people who wanted to “get away from it all”. Since then it has lost its hippy image and expanded into a flourishing community, while still keeping its isolation and some eccentricities. The story of the settlement is told in a former lighthouse (right) which was moved to a position beside the track. Wind turbines (home-made or home-designed) are a speciality. There is a village hall with accommodation. A jetty provides the shortest access to a road via an informal ferry to Badluarach. (9km one way)



Beinn Ghobhlach^G (635m). This prominent and distinctive hill is reached from the Badrallach-Scoraig path, up steep slopes and then across complex ground to its foot.

Flora and Fauna

The wild plants and animals of the area are too numerous to consider in detail here: *see the companion booklet “Wild Wester Ross”*. Instead here is a simplified summary of the main ecological zones with some typical examples of flora and fauna found in them:

All zones: heather (ling), lichens; pine marten, fox, badger; golden eagle, white-tailed (sea) eagle (re-introduced at Loch Maree 1993-8), buzzard, raven, hooded crow (aka hoodie).

(1) **Mountain top:** alpine lady’s mantle, stiff sedge, fringe moss (Racomitrium), dwarf willow; feral goat, mountain hare; ptarmigan, golden plover.

(2) **Dry hill slopes:** bell heather, crowberry, blaeberry, acid grasslands; gorse (aka whin) and bracken at lower altitude; red deer; grouse, stonechat.

(3) **Boggy moorland:** bog asphodel, cross-leaved heath, sundew & butterwort (both insectivorous), bog myrtle, willow scrub, sphagnum moss, cotton grass & deer grass (both sedges), purple moor grass (Molinia); red deer; meadow pipit, snipe, woodcock.

(4) **Woodland:** scots pine, oak, birch, rowan, larch (introduced c1850), ferns; roe deer.

(5) **Coast:** thrift (sea pink); otter, common/grey seal, porpoise, dolphin, minke whale, basking shark; red-throated diver, eider, merganser, heron. ...and midges (try *Smidge!*)

Brief History of Gairloch District

PREHISTORY

After the Ice Age, the land was recolonised by plants and animals. The oldest evidence for humans living here is at Red Point, where over 2000 “lithics” (artificially worked stones) from the Mesolithic/Neolithic/Bronze Ages have been found, perhaps **5000-2000BC**. Next comes a Neolithic workplace above Achtercairn, carbon-dated **2769 and 1391BC**; the only dwelling houses dated so far roundhouses in the same place, **726BC and 477BC** and here there is also a large Iron Age ceremonial circle of **254BC**. About 200 roundhouses from the Bronze or Iron Ages, perhaps **2000BC to 700AD**, have been found so far in the area covered by this booklet. The people may have been Celts, speaking a language closer to Welsh than to Gaelic.

ROMANS AND PICTS

About **140AD** the Greek Ptolemy made a map of Britain, naming the native tribe living here as the **Carnonacae**. The Romans did not reach Wester Ross. The Pictish kingdom and culture, which probably started as a union of Celtic tribes against the Romans in the east and south, barely affected the area; only two simple Pictish carved stones have been found (one is in Gairloch Heritage Museum, the other in Londubh graveyard, Poolewe).

CHRISTIANITY AND GAELIC

Christianity began to appear in this area some time after St Columba reached Iona in 563AD. St Donan (died 617AD) came from Eigg, and St Maelrubha (died 722AD) visited from his base at Applecross, making his home here on Isle Maree; Loch Maree, formerly called (Inner) Loch Ewe, was later renamed after him. These Irish missionaries brought with them the Gaelic language (Q-Celtic), which gradually displaced the old language (P-Celtic).

VIKINGS

There is no evidence of invaders reaching Wester Ross until the **Vikings** arrived from about **800AD**, and even then the only evidence is found in Norse place-names: for example, many ending in -dale (dalr = valley), several in -a (ey = island) or -aig (vik = bay). No definite Viking remains have been found. It is possible that they first used the islands such as Longa and Gruinard as their winter quarters, but they must then have settled in the area.

CLANS

The first written mention of Gairloch comes from **1292**, when it was made part of the sheriffdom of Skye. Then it fell to the Earl of Ross, and after the earldom disappeared the Gairloch area the **MacBeaths** were dominant, followed after 1430 by the **MacLeods**; both were clans of Viking descent. In **1480** two MacLeods murdered their brother's two sons at Loch Tollaidh because their mother was a Mackenzie. The **Mackenzies** appealed to the king in Edinburgh, who gave Hector Roy Mackenzie a “Commission of Fire and Sword” against the MacLeods and in **1494** granted him the land of Gairloch. He became the first laird, and Gairloch Estate has belonged to the Mackenzies ever since. These Mackenzies were a cadet branch of the family who became Earls of Seaforth.

ESTATES AND CLEARANCES

Between them these and other Mackenzies controlled most of Wester Ross. But in the **1800s** all the estates in Gairloch district except Gairloch itself were sold, often to pay off debts. Many of these were for a time subject to clearances (but not Gairloch): to make way for sheep farmers, the new owners removed their tenants, often forcibly, either to the less fertile coast or overseas. Especially notorious was Meyrick Bankes of Gruinard (p28). Later, parts of Gairloch Estate too were sold off, and the former 170,000 acre estate is now 57,000 acres.

IMPROVEMENTS AND ROADS

Gairloch Estate remains in the hands of the original Mackenzie lairds, a rare situation in the Highlands (they also have land at Conon Bridge in Easter Ross). A key period in its history was the **1840s**. When other estates were clearing tenant farmers, here their lot was improved: new

crofts of 4-5 acres were laid out to replace the earlier “runrig” system (in which cultivable land was re-allocated annually, so that there was little incentive to improve the ground). These crofting “townships” are the basis of the modern villages. In the same decade there was a famine caused by potato blight; a Destitution Fund was set up, and the money was used to create employment in building roads, now called “**Destitution Roads**”. The first drivable road to Gairloch from the east, along Loch Maree, was opened in **1849**; the Kerrysdale-Badachro, Poolewe-Cove and Poolewe-Aultbea roads were also Destitution Roads.

IRON AND CONVOYS

The area has usually been something of a backwater, but at least twice it has played a part in national affairs. In the early **1600s** Loch Maree saw the **first major ironworks** in Scotland, thanks to its supply of trees and initially bog-iron: the main ironworks were near Kinlochewe, Letterewe, and Poolewe where the Red Smiddy can still be seen. In both **World Wars**, Loch Ewe was used as a base by the Royal Navy, most importantly in the Second World War as a **collecting point for convoys, including those sailing to Russia** (p31).

For more detail, see the companion booklet “The Story of Gairloch”.

Dixon’s Gairloch

In 1886 John H Dixon published his *Gairloch and Guide to Loch Maree*. It was re-printed in 1974 and is still available at Gairloch Museum. It is a remarkable source of every imaginable kind of information about the area. Although not a native of the area, Dixon clearly fell in love with it; he describes it as “unsurpassed, as I think, for its combinations of noble mountains, gleaming lochs, wide moorlands, rugged crags, rocky torrents, and smiling woods, all diversified from hour to hour according to the spectator’s point of view, and the constant transmutations of sunshine and shade, of calm and storm...”.

Evidence of the past

Clearance Cairns: piles of rocks cleared from the ground to make arable fields.

Corn Drying Kilns: stone-lined circular hollows with a fireplace and flue attached; most townships had several.

Cottage Ruins: the houses of small tenant farmers (crofters) or cottars (labourers): simple stone and turf before the Clearances or, around Gairloch, the Improvement; dry stone thereafter.

Duns: fortified areas, some shown on the OS map; used by the early clans, but some may be prehistoric in origin.

Field Walls: lines of large stones (usually prehistoric), turf walls, dry-stone dyking, etc; the “head wall” above a township showed where common grazing started.

Fishing Stations: buildings and equipment used by commercial coastal salmon-netting operations at Red Point, Achtercairn, Big Sand, Poolewe, Laide etc after about 1870.

Fishtraps: curved walls built out from the shore, to catch fish as the tide went out.

Lazybeds: old cultivation ridges, made by piling seaweed and soil between walls of turf.

Old Roads: the single-track predecessors of modern roads, from 1830; e.g. in places above the Loch Maree road can be seen the old Destitution Road, later tarred, and the unfinished military road of 1763 (started by Major Caulfield, a successor of General Wade).

Peat Cuttings: peat was the normal fuel for fires, and is still used by some people; it was carried home on specially made **Peat Tracks**.

Ports: passageways to the sea cleared of rocks, for launching boats.

Roundhouses (or Hut Circles): the ruined circular stone walls of Bronze or Iron Age houses etc (see the booklet *Prehistoric Roundhouses of Wester Ross*).

Shieling Huts: the stone remains of small tent-like huts used by those who were looking after their livestock which was moved to the hill grazing (shieling) in summer.

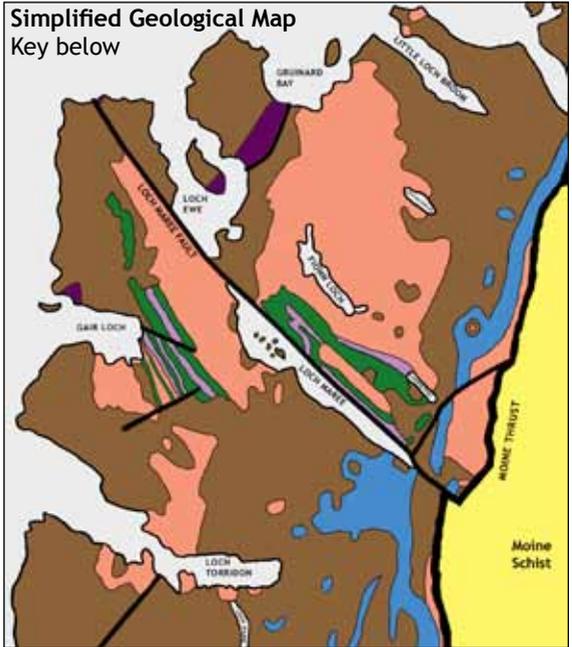
Geology

Geology, the study of rocks, is the key to understanding Wester Ross. The ancient rocks here survived when, 430 million years ago, tectonic movement raised the Caledonian mountain chain in the east and pushed the Moine Schist westwards. The **MOINE THRUST** stopped just in time! In hills along its “bow-wave” thrusting has created some extraordinary effects.

More recently, up to 11,500 years ago, the **ICE AGE** brought glaciers, mostly moving NW, which shaped the landscape we see today. An obvious sign is the boulders dropped everywhere by the melting glaciers.

The **LOCH MAREE FAULT** is an important feature from at least a billion years ago, showing as a straight line from Glen Docherty to the sea beyond Loch Ewe.

Simplified Geological Map
Key below



LEWISIAN GNEISS

3 billion years old, metamorphosed granite-type rocks: pink, white or grey, often with dark “Scourie dykes”: the oldest rock in Western Europe: underlies the whole area, forming where exposed a rough rocky landscape of small hills (e.g. Gruinard, Tollie, Diabaig). (Gneiss is pronounced *nice*.)



LEWISIAN: LOCH MAREE GROUP

2 billion years old, a complex with two main types of rock: AMPHIBOLITE (hornblende schist): metamorphosed basalt: green, weathering to grey (e.g. An Groban, Beinn Airigh Charr).



SEMIPELITE (biotite schist): metamorphosed mudstone etc: grey, weathering to rusty brown: soft, easily eroded to form valleys (e.g. upper Flowerdale).



TORRIDONIAN SANDSTONE

1 billion years old, laid down in fresh water, originally miles thick: usually a hardened sandstone but may vary from shale to breccia (conglomerate), reddish colour caused by feldspar: forms flat boggy ground (e.g. the peninsulas) or spectacular isolated mountains (e.g. An Teallach, Torridon Hills).



CAMBRIAN QUARTZITE

500 million years old, laid down in salt water, hard white sandstone: caps many hills (e.g. Beinn Eighe): some layers are Pipe Rock, full of fossilised burrows of worm-like creatures.



There is also a little Triassic and Jurassic rock.

For more detail, see the companion booklet “Wester Ross Rocks”.



The essential reference guide to central
WESTER ROSS:

- What to see and do along the A832 and its seven side roads
- More than 60 walks
- All shops, eating places and activities
- The history and geology of the area
- Some of the most spectacular scenic drives in Britain
- Major highlights include the Torridon Hills, Loch Maree, Inverewe Garden



A Warning to Visitors

If this is your first visit, then beware:
make sure your eyes and ears and mind stay closed,
or else you risk enchantment while you're here.

Ignore the glories of the hills and lochs,
the peaceful woods, the sea, the craggy coast,
avoid the heather moors and ancient rocks.

You must not linger by refreshing streams,
nor wander on the quiet wave-lapped sand:
do not let nature's beauty spoil your dreams.

Resolve to shun the wildlife from the start
and scorn the views (head down and phone in hand),
or Wester Ross's charms will win your heart.