

# The Western Highlands

The Western Highlands is the earthly equivalent of a walker's heaven. It is a remote and starkly beautiful area, sparsely populated, with beautiful glens and lochs and some of the finest mountains in Britain. In summer the clear air provides rich colours, and (sometimes) great views from the ridges and summits. The sheer number of peaks and their infinite variety attracts walkers from all over the country, year after year. In small and crowded Britain, this is as close as it gets to real wilderness. All this is contained in the area between Glen Moriston and Glen Shiel in the south and Ullapool in the north, and bounded in the east by a line running through Garve.

The wildness integral to this area's charms can make logistics difficult for walkers on a short visit from abroad, especially if you are relying on public transport. If you have the time, the effort will be well rewarded. At any time of year the walking can be difficult, so this is no place to begin learning mountain techniques. But if you are fit, competent, well-equipped and, ideally, have plenty of time, the Western Highlands should be extremely rewarding, even addictive.

The routes we describe in this section are nontechnical (ie no ropes), are easily reached by car or public transport and there is a range of accommodation nearby. They are but a taste of the fine opportunities available, with several other classic walks in each of the Glen Shiel, Torridon and Great Wilderness areas.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Traversing the **Five Sisters'** (p386) slender, scenic ridge above dramatic Glen Shiel
- Being knocked sideways by the views of Scotland's west coast from atop the **Horns of Alligin** (p392)
- Scaling the heights of **Slioch** (p393), the dramatic peak above Loch Maree, on the threshold of the Great Wilderness



## INFORMATION When to Walk

The three walks in this chapter are best done between mid-May and early October, after any late-spring snow has gone and before the chances of snowfalls increase dramatically.

## Maps

Two maps in the OS Travel – Road 1:250,000 series cover the area: No 2 *Northern Scotland* and No 3 *Western Scotland*.

## Books

Two publications by the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC), *The Northwest Highlands* by DJ Bennett and T Strang, and *The Munros* by Rab Anderson and Donald Bennet, provide a good introduction to the area.

## Information Sources

**Gairloch tourist office** (☎ 0845 225 5121; gairloch@visitscotland.com) is the main information point for the Western Highlands. It is informative and well staffed, selling maps and guidebooks and providing weather forecasts for the area. The encompassing website for the whole of the Highlands is www.visithighlands.com.

## GETTING AROUND

All three areas in this chapter are served by buses from Inverness: Scottish Citylink for Glen Shiel; and Westerbus and Scotbus for Torridon and Slioch. The Fort William–Skye bus also services Glen Shiel.

## GATEWAYS

Inverness and Fort William (p362) serve as the main gateways to the area. Both have good daily Scottish Citylink bus and First ScotRail train links to the rest of Scotland, and to London (First ScotRail and GNER).

## THE SPANISH CONNECTION

In the long struggle between government and Jacobite forces, which ended at the Battle of Culloden in 1745, a lesser-known battle took place in Glen Shiel. In June 1719 Jacobite troops, including a Spanish regiment, landed at Eilean Donan Castle beside Loch Duich. Government troops came from Inverness and the two sides met about 1 mile west of the starting point for this walk (there is a National Trust for Scotland interpretive sign at the site). The government troops routed the Jacobites and the last to flee were the Spanish, who dashed up the mountainside to the pass now called Bealach nan Spainteach and down into Gleann Lichd.

Inverness is also served by daily flights from Glasgow, Edinburgh, London, Belfast and Dublin.

# GLEN SHIEL

Travelling west to the Isle of Skye you pass through what appears to be the impenetrable Glen Shiel. The winding road snakes between steep-sided, rock-encrusted mountains, soaring skywards to the north, and rising almost as steeply and ruggedly to the south. The long spiky ridge to the north of the glen is known as the Five Sisters of Kintail.

## THE FIVE SISTERS OF KINTAIL

<b>Duration</b>	6¾–8 hours
<b>Distance</b>	7.5 miles (12km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	demanding
<b>Start</b>	Glen Shiel car park
<b>Finish</b>	Ault a' chruinn (opposite)
<b>Transport</b>	private

**Summary** One of the finest ridge walks in Scotland – an arduous but immensely scenic walk over rough ground, traversing some narrow ridges along mostly clear, well-used paths.

This chain of elegant, precipitous summits, separated by slits of passes (or bealachs), falls away vertiginously to Glen Shiel on one side and to the more remote and peaceful Gleann Lichd on the other. To the northwest the ridge drops a little less steeply to the shores of beautiful Loch Duich. Three of the sisters are Munros (peaks over 3000ft/914m) – Sgurr Fhuaran (Peak of Springs, 1067m), Sgurr na Càrnach (Rocky Peak, 1002m) and Sgurr na Ciste Duibhe (Peak of the Black Chest, 1027m). The other two, at the north end

of the ridge, are Sgurr nan Saighead (Arrows Peak, 929m) and Sgurr na Moraich (Mighty Peak, 876m). And that isn't all: before you even reach the southernmost sister you have to climb over Sgurr nan Spainteach (Peak of the Spaniards, 990m); see the boxed text, opposite, for the history behind this unusual name.

The ridge commands fine views, with the Torridon mountains punctuating the horizon to the northwest, the Isle of Skye spreadeagled across the western skyline and the islands of Canna, Eigg and Rum sailing between the rugged southwestern peaks – and much, much more.

## PLANNING

Far and away the best direction for this walk is from southeast to northwest – walking towards the views, starting at a higher point than where you finish, and with a slightly less steep and knee-jarring descent. If you're staying at Morvich or Shiel Bridge, add about 1 mile. The distance isn't unusually long but the ascent of 1530m is nearly 100m more than a romp up Ben Nevis. Keep in mind that even when you've reached the highest point on the walk (Sgurr Fhuaran) the climbing isn't over – there are still two peaks to go.

## Alternatives

Once you're on the ridge, escape routes are few. People do go down to Glen Shiel via the spur from Sgurr Fhuaran, but this is seriously steep. Routes to and from Gleann Lichd, on the other side, are feasible and, indeed, have much to recommend them. There is a clear path up to the ridge at Bealach an Làpain from Glenlicht House, and the long ridge thrusting eastwards from Sgurr Fhuaran offers a fairly straightforward climb or descent.

## When to Walk

The Five Sisters are very exposed and can be extremely hazardous in poor visibility, strong wind or rain, so it's worth waiting for the right day for this classic ridge walk. This is also important because there's a lot of loose rock along the ridge, especially on the descents into, and climbs out of, bealachs, so considerable care is needed for your own and others' safety. The best times are May and June, and September to early October.

The whole ridge is within the NTS' Kintail Estate, so access is open at all times.

## Maps

The Harvey Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Kintail: Glen Shiel* covers the Five Sisters and has some background information and local contacts. The relevant Ordnance Survey (OS) Landranger 1:50,000 map is No 33 *Loch Alsh, Glen Shiel & Loch Hourn*.

## Information Sources

At Morvich, about 1.5 miles from the A87, the **NTS** (☎ 01599-511231; kintail@nts.org.uk) maintains a small, usually unstaffed tourist office featuring the Kintail Estate; the weather forecast is displayed daily. Countryside rangers based here run guided walks during summer.

## NEAREST TOWNS

### Ault a' chruinn & Shiel Bridge

You can't really call Ault a' chruinn a village – it's more a scattered collection of houses around the junction of the A87 and the minor road to Morvich. Shiel Bridge is a hamlet scattered along the A87, and is a popular refreshment stop on the way to the Isle of Skye.

**Morvich Caravan Club Site** (☎ 01599-511354; www.caravanclub.co.uk; Inverinate; sites for 2 £19) is about 1 mile north of Ault a' chruinn. Pitches at this secluded, sheltered site are flat and grassy.

**Shielbridge Caravan & Camping Site** (☎ 01599-511211; Shiel Bridge; sites for 2 £5) is flat and open, with great views of the Five Sisters; facilities are clean and well-maintained.

**Kintail Lodge Hotel** (☎ 01599-511275; www.kintailodgehotel.co.uk; dm/s/d £13/50/58; breakfast £10, lunch & dinner mains to £10) offers superior hotel accommodation, the Trekkers' Lodge, with twins and singles, and the Wee Bunk House, offering dorm-style accommodation.

The off-licence **Shielshop** (Shiel Bridge; ☎ daily) has a very good range of supplies and local maps.

**Jac-O-Bite Restaurant** (☎ 01599-511347; Ault a' chruinn; breakfast £7, lunch mains £4-7, dinner mains £9-20) has a superb outlook. The smallish menu features plenty of local produce and daily specials are offered.

**Five Sisters Restaurant** (☎ 01599-511221; Shiel Bridge; breakfast £4-7, lunch £4-7) offers standard fare in cheerful surroundings.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

**Scottish Citylink** (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) buses stop at Shiel Bridge from Glasgow (4¼ hours, three daily) and the Isle of Skye via Fort William (1½ hours, three daily), as do its buses between Inverness (1½ hours, three daily) and Portree (1½ hours, three daily).

Shiel Bridge is on the A87 trunk road, which branches from the A82 Inverness–Fort William road at Invergarry. From Inverness turn off the A82 at Invermoriston along the A887 to join the A87 near Loch Cluanie.

**GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK**

The walk starts at a car park beside the A87, 5 miles west of Cluanie Inn. This car park (not signposted at the time of writing) is about 100m west of the one marked on the OS 1:50,000 map. Scottish Citylink buses through Shiel Bridge (see above) stop at Cluanie Inn.

The walk finishes on the minor road to Morvich (which branches from the A87, 1.5 miles from Shiel Bridge) in the hamlet of Ault a' chruinn, beside Loch Duich. The closest parking area is at the nearby Jac-O-Bite restaurant.

**THE WALK**  
**Glen Shiel Car Park to Sgurr na Ciste Duibhe**

2½–3 hours, 2 miles (3km)

Just uphill from the car park, go through a small gate, immediately right of a burn, and follow a clear path up to a forest track. Just 12m to your right, beside a burn, bear left along a clear path. It follows a generally zigzagging route up beside the burn, through a young conifer plantation, climbing fairly steeply, to a gate in a high fence, leading onto open moorland. Continue on the path, soon bearing left to cross a burn at the foot of a small waterfall. The path leads northwest, up below a crag, zigzags then makes a rising traverse to the remains of an old stone wall. Climb beside or on it for a few minutes then bear left and cross a small stream. From there, in the absence of a clearly defined path, climb the steep, grassy slope to the main ridge, reaching it west of Bealach an Lápain, near Beinn Odhar. Suddenly you're in a different world – surrounded by mountains and deep glens and, for the moment, out of earshot of the traffic on the road below.

Turn west along the ridge crest and follow the well-worn path up to a breezy

arête and on over the twin bumps of Beinn Odhar. Then comes a shallow dip and a rocky climb to **Sgurr nan Spainteach**. A scramble down the face of a bluff takes you to the amazingly narrow Bealach nan Spainteach. Make your way up through the boulders to the neat summit cairn on **Sgurr na Ciste Duibhe**, the first of the Five Sisters. Here you can look east towards Glen Affric through the gap at the top of Gleann Lichd and, in the opposite direction, contemplate the serrated skyline of the Isle of Skye beyond Loch Duich.

**Sgurr na Ciste Duibhe to Sgurr Fhuaran**  
1½–1¾ hours, 1.5 miles (2.5km)

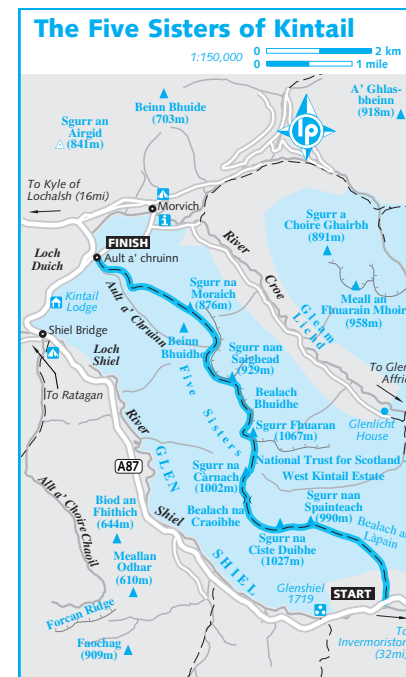
The ridge changes direction, leading northwest as you continue down to Bealach na Craobhe (Pass of the Tree), keeping to the highest ground. The line of ascent then turns north to **Sgurr na Càrnach**, the second Sister. From here new features in the panorama include Lochs Affric and Benevean to the east. The first bit of the descent is down a narrow cleft to the left, then it bears right to regain the line of the ridge and go down to Bealach na Càrnach. A steep, rocky, twisting path takes care of the climb to **Sgurr Fhuaran**, the highest point on the ridge and the third Sister. From here the view is just as absorbing as those from her siblings.

**Sgurr Fhuaran to Sgurr na Moraich**  
1¾–2 hours, 2.5 miles (4km)

Leaving the summit cairn, take care to head northwest then north on this awesome and spectacular descent to Bealach Bhuidhe. The path then traverses above the dramatic sheets of cliffs leading up to **Sgurr nan Saighead**, Sister number four. The ridge now changes character with more small, rocky knobs to negotiate on the way down and then up to Beinn Bhuidhe (Yellow Hill). A rough path drops down to a narrow gap, with fine views of Gleann Lichd below. Climb straight up and soon the path follows a more even course among rocky outcrops and, for a pleasant change, across grass and finally up to **Sgurr na Moraich**, Sister number five.

**Sgurr na Moraich to Ault a' chruinn**  
1–1¼ hours, 1.5 miles (2.5km)

Having led northwest from the summit, straight towards the Skye Bridge, the path



fades. Keep well to the left of the broad spur, generally northwest (or about 300 degrees magnetic), as you descend very steeply over grass and heather, steering away from the small cliffs bristling on the crest of the spur. Keep your eye on the crags on the western side of Allt a' chruinn as a guide to the best route down to a narrow path high above the stream. Follow it down to a stile and continue to a water treatment works. Turn right along a vehicle track, which becomes a sealed road, meeting the Morvich road in Ault a' chruinn, about 200m from its junction with the A87.

**TORRIDON**

The Torridon mountains dominate a wild area of lochans, moors, deep glens, spectacular corries and rugged peaks.

Within the Torridon group are three major mountains. Liathach (pronounced 'lee-agach' by the locals) is a massive wall of a mountain, festooned with pinnacles and buttresses, crags and boulder fields, its

**DEER STALKING**

Managing Scotland's wild deer population is an organised and ecologically and economically important business. The 750,000-strong population comprises four species – red, roe, sika and fallow. Red deer are the biggest and most numerous and have the greatest impact on the land. A balance must be maintained between deer numbers and their habitat, so they have enough to eat without wrecking the vegetation.

The **Deer Commission for Scotland** (☎ 01463-725000; www.dcs.gov.uk) has fostered the establishment of deer management groups – voluntary groups of landowners covering areas with distinct herds – in most parts of the country. Regular censuses govern the annual cull, when older and unhealthy animals are shot by experienced professional stalkers using high-velocity rifles. The sport of deer stalking, a good income-earner for estates and local communities, is integrated into the cull.

During the stalking season, mostly between mid-August and mid-October, you can help to minimise disturbance by doing your best to find out where the activity is taking place and by heeding advice on alternative routes. Avoid crossing land where stalking is taking place. Management groups provide detailed on-site information, usually specifying preferred walking routes. This may also be available through the **Hillphones** (www.hillphones.info) service, or perhaps from local tourist offices. The National Trust for Scotland, John Muir Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Forestry Commission and Scottish Natural Heritage may conduct stalking on their lands but generally maintain access for walkers throughout the year.

Some estates don't belong to deer management groups and some aren't cooperative. It's worth remembering that access along rights of way is always open, and that shooting doesn't happen on Sunday.

main summit being Spidean a' Choire Léith (1055m). To the east is the Beinn Eighe massif (972m), not quite as high as Liathach though its several outliers make it bigger 'on the ground'. Beinn Dearg (914m), a magnificent horseshoe-shaped peak north of Liathach across a wide glen, may be comparatively lowly, but lacks little in the way of ruggedness. And then there's Beinn Alligin, the subject of this section and the ideal introduction to this wonderful area.

The Torridon Estate (2.5 sq miles), purchased by the NTS in 1967, embraces most of these peaks. It adjoins the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve, owned and managed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

## BEINN ALLIGIN

<b>Duration</b>	6–8 hours
<b>Distance</b>	6.5 miles (10.5km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate–demanding
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Torridon House Bridge
<b>Nearest Towns</b>	Torridon (above)
<b>Transport</b>	private
<b>Summary</b>	An exciting circuit of a horseshoe ridge, crossing two major summits. It involves several steep and exposed sections and some scrambling.

Some Torridon routes are serious undertakings, involving difficult scrambling in very exposed locations, and are beyond the scope of this book. However, Beinn Alligin's summit, Sgurr Mhór (986m) and the peak Tom na Gruagaich (922m) can both be reached without encountering any technical difficulties, although this is still a serious mountain walk and not suitable for the unfit or inexperienced. Sgurr Mhór and Tom na Gruagaich, both Munros, and the spectacular subsidiary peaks, the Horns of Alligin, are linked by a ridge curving round the huge corrie Toll a' Mhadaidh Mor (the Fox Hole). Even more dramatic is the great gash of Eag Dhubh (the Black Cleft) in the back wall of the corrie, running from the summit ridge to the base and appearing to split the mountain in two.

The accepted meaning of Beinn Alligin is 'Mountain of Beauty' or 'Jewelled Mountain'. Either way, it's definitely a gem – a mountain that allows you to get a feel for the high and wild Scottish peaks without

having to be a mountaineer or to cover long approach routes. Another plus is that the mountain is owned by the NTS, so access is open at all times.

## PLANNING

The recommended direction for this circular walk is anticlockwise, so that you tackle the peaks while you're still fresh. The walk involves around 1300m of ascent.

Even in summer patches of snow lurk in shaded corners, the mist can be thick and the winds strong enough to blow you over if you happen to be caught in a sudden storm. Map-reading and compass skills are essential if the mist comes down, which is always likely. Although there's a well-defined path most of the way, beware of side paths that can lead to dead-end lookouts or potential difficulties.

## Maps & Books

The OS Landranger 1:50,000 maps No 19 *Gairloch & Ullapool* and 24 *Raasay & Applecross* overlap on Beinn Alligin. Harvey's Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Torridon* is much more useful.

The SMC's guide *The Munros* by Rab Anderson and Donald Bennet is the most comprehensive guide to this walk (and the others in the Torridon area).

## Guided Walks

Countryside rangers lead short walks aimed at introducing the natural and cultural landscape of Torridon between June and August, and high-level guided mountain walks are available by appointment. Contact the NTS Countryside Centre (below) for details.

## Information Sources

The **NTS Countryside Centre** (☎ 01445-791221; exhibition £3; ☞ 10am–5pm Easter-Sep) is just off the A896, at the entrance to Torridon village. It stocks maps and a very good range of walking and environment books relating to the local area. Displays feature the scenery and wildlife of the Torridon mountains and Loch Torridon. Mountain weather forecasts are posted beside the entrance daily.

The nearest **tourist office** (☎ 0845 225 5121; gairloch@visitscotland.com; ☞ daily Easter-Sep, Mon–Sat Oct–Apr) is in Gairloch, 31 miles away.

## TORRIDONIAN ROCKS

The exposed rocky flanks and summits of many of the peaks in this area display the geological processes that created the region. Ancient Lewisian gneiss, up to 2500 million years old, is the bedrock. In a much-eroded state, it was smothered by desert sands up to 4 miles thick around 800 million years ago when the area was in equatorial regions. The sedimentary material hardened to form a rock so localised it has been named red Torridonian sandstone (though it looks more purple than red). Slioch (p393), with its distinctive double-tiered silhouette, exhibits this rock particularly well, with a broad grey base topped by an 800m-high mound of red sandstone.

Much of this relatively soft sandstone has been eroded, mainly by successive ice ages, wind and rain, which have sculpted wonderful pinnacles and crags on high ridges. The pinnacles on An Teallach (p397) and the Horns of Beinn Alligin are superb examples. These days, the glue-like friction afforded by the fine-grained sandstone makes the area an ideal scramblers' playground.

The third main geological component of the area, Cambrian quartzite, was formed by sediments laid down by tropical seas, which flooded the sandstone some 600 million years ago. At the end of the last Ice Age, this rock was the first to emerge from the ice mantle. It was riven into pinnacles and shattered into scree, notably on Beinn Eighe (p393), which makes it look snow-covered, even in midsummer.

## NEAREST TOWN

### Torridon

The small village of Torridon, spread out along Loch Torridon's northern shore, at the foot of the towering western reaches of Liathach, is the main settlement in the area. The nearest ATM is in Gairloch, 31 miles away, although the shop may be able to provide a cash-back service for small amounts on UK bank cards.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Torridon Campsite** (free) is opposite the NTS Countryside Centre. It's basic – just a patch of grass; use the nearby public toilets.

**Torridon SYHA Hostel** (☎ 0870 004 1154; www.syha.org.uk; dm £13) has mainly smaller-than-average rooms, two lounges with panoramic views and a first-rate drying room.

**Ben Damph Inn** (☎ 01445-791242; www.bendamph.lochtorridonhotel.com; s/d £50/74, mains £7–12; ☞ lunch & dinner) occupies a former stable that has been converted to motel-style accommodation, but without the sterile atmosphere that such places can have. The bar, where you can sample some of the 60 malt whiskies on offer, is the centre of evening activity in the area. The only catch is its location, on the south side of the loch, a couple of miles from Torridon village.

**Torridon Stores** (☞ Mon–Sat) is small but is well-stocked and carries camping gear, books, maps and a great array of Scottish beers. It's 800m northwest from the junction, along the Inveralligin–Diabaig road.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Torridon is at the eastern end of Loch Torridon, on the A896 between Lochcarron and Kinlochewe. It is possible to travel by public transport, if you are prepared to fit in with limited connecting services.

**First ScotRail** (☎ 0845 755 0033; www.firstscotrail.co.uk) operates the service to the nearest train station, Strathcarron, from Inverness (1¼ hours, four services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and Kyle of Lochalsh (45 minutes, four services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday).

**Donnie MacLennan** (☎ 01520-755239) runs a bus service from Strathcarron station to Torridon. He waits for the trains from both Kyle and Inverness that arrive around 12.40pm Monday to Saturday. For the return journey the bus leaves Torridon about 10.30am, arriving at Strathcarron in time for the 12.40pm trains to Kyle and Inverness. The times and services can change, so contact Donnie beforehand.

## GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

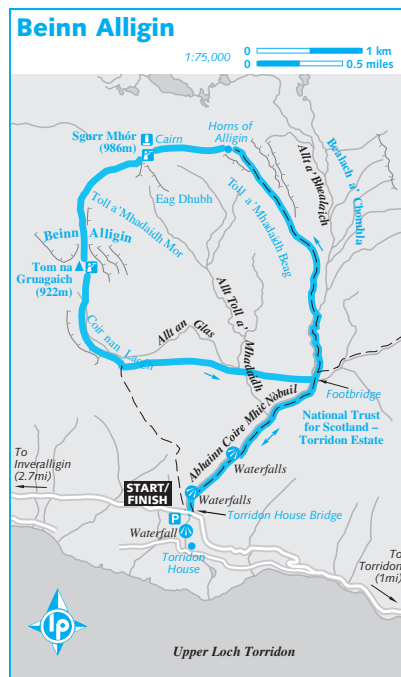
The walk starts almost opposite the fairly large car park beside Torridon House Bridge, about 2 miles west of Torridon on the narrow Inveralligin road.

## THE WALK

### Torridon House Bridge to Sgurr Mhór

3–4 hours, 3.5 miles (5.5km)

From the bridge (which affords a good view of the impressive waterfall and gorge



on Abhainn Coire Mhìc Nòbuil) follow a path, signposted to Coire Dubh, up through Scots pine woodland and out into moorland. Straight ahead is the blunt western wall of Beinn Dearg. To the right (east) is the western end of Liathach and to the left (west) is Beinn Alligin. About 200m further along, go through a gate in a deer fence. Almost 1km beyond here, the clear path crosses a footbridge and aims roughly north, towards the eastern end of the Alligin horseshoe ridge.

Continue up the crest of the broad and very steep ridge, using your hands for balance while negotiating some rocky steps, and aim for the three **Horns of Alligin**. You reach the base of the first horn about 1½ to two hours from the start. You can scramble over this and the next two rocky peaks, taking care on the steep descent of the first pinnacle. Alternatively, follow the path that skirts the peaks on their southern side.

After the third horn, drop to a small col and then go up again, swinging round to the left (northwest) and keeping the steep drop down into the corrie on your left. To

your right (northeast) the view really begins to open out – a beautifully jumbled mosaic of lochans, moors and smaller peaks, with Loch Maree and the coast town of Gairloch beyond. Behind, too, the view keeps on getting better – down the corrie and across Loch Torridon to the mountains around Beinn Damph.

You soon reach **Sgurr Mhór** (986m), and with the extra height the view is almost 360 degrees: range upon range of wonderful peaks spread out in all directions. Most notable to the southwest are the Cuillin peaks on Skye and, to the east, the summits of Beinn Eighe, the quartz scree making them appear eternally snowcapped.

### Sgurr Mhór to Torridon House Bridge

3–4 hours, 3 miles (5km)

From the summit, head northwest down a grassy slope, keeping the corrie edge to the left. In poor visibility take particular care on this section as the top of **Eag Dhubh**, the giant gash that dominates the view from below, is hereabouts, just waiting to trap unwary walkers in mist. If, however, the day is clear, the cliffs on either side of the gully frame the view of the glen far below, one of Scottish walking's many classic vistas. *Don't* try to descend this way.

Beyond Eag Dhubh go steeply up again, over large boulders, to reach **Tom na Gruagaich** (922m), about one to 1½ hours from Sgurr Mhór. There's a trig point to lean against as you have a last look at the view before heading down.

The descent is steep but straightforward. Walk south into Coire nan Laogh, between the main western ridge and the ridge extending from Tom na Gruagaich, dropping steeply on an eroded path with several small streams gurgling along beside. The steep walls of the corrie funnel you down to a rocky plateau. Here, if Abhainn Coire Mhìc Nòbuil isn't in spate, steer a course slightly south of east to reach Allt a' Bhealaich, just above the footbridge you crossed on the way out. Cross the bridge to reach the path and retrace your steps to the road and car park.

Otherwise, head southeast to avoid crags on the broad ridge and to find a stile over a long deer fence on the eastern fall of the spur. Follow rough paths to the road opposite the car park. The descent from Tom na Gruagaich should take about two hours.

### BEINN EIGHE MOUNTAIN TRAIL

If the clouds are down over the high peaks, or perhaps you have half a day to spare, the Beinn Eighe Mountain Trail provides an excellent introduction to the area. This waymarked route is only 2.5 miles long (though it involves around 550m ascent) and takes in the best low- to mid-level terrain in the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve, including beautiful stands of native Scots pine. There is a short, steep section of rocky ground to negotiate to reach the higher section, where the path weaves past secluded lochans and offers a real impression of being in the heart of the mountains. There are also wonderful views of the Beinn Eighe massif and across Loch Maree to Slioch.

The walk starts and finishes at the Glas Leitir parking area beside Loch Maree, a few miles northwest of Kinlochewe (on the main road to Gairloch) and about 18 miles from Torridon. You should allow at least 2½ hours, and take the usual precautions with footwear, waterproofs, food and drink. A booklet produced by Scottish Natural Heritage has a map of the route, and plenty of information about local wildlife and geology. This should be available from the **Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve Visitor Centre** (☎ 01445-760254; www.nnr-scotland.org.uk; 🗺 Easter-Oct), 0.75 miles north of Kinlochewe along the A832. It houses displays about the reserve's habitats and sells maps and natural history guides.

## THE GREAT WILDERNESS

The Great Wilderness stretches from Little Loch Broom in the north to Loch Maree in the south, and from the Fannich mountains in the east to the west coast village of Poolewe, an area of about 180 sq miles. For visitors from New World countries in particular, where wilderness areas are on a grand scale, this title may seem presumptuous. But it must be judged by Scottish, indeed British, standards. On these small islands, the fact that it's relatively far from any towns, that there are no roads, only a handful of buildings of any sort, and certainly no pubs or shops within its bounds undoubtedly merits the title.

The landscape is mountainous with many fine, austere peaks. Between the mountains there are lochs of all shapes and sizes, rivers and waterfalls, peat bogs and grassy glens, but very few trees. It may seem strange to see Fisherfield Forest, Letterewe Forest and Dundonnell Forest on the map, but 'forest' here means hunting ground and these names delineate separate estates.

Most of the peaks in the Great Wilderness are rather remote and best climbed in the course of an extended walk of at least two, and preferably three or four, days. Here, however, we describe a day walk to Slioch, on the southwestern threshold of the area, and a superb initiation into its wildness and beauty.

### SLIOCH

<b>Duration</b>	7½ hours
<b>Distance</b>	11.8 miles (19km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate–demanding
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Incheril car park
<b>Nearest Town</b>	Kinlochewe (p394)
<b>Transport</b>	bus

**Summary** A beautiful approach along the wooded shores of Loch Maree leads to a neat mountain horseshoe with excellent views.

The dramatic, double-tiered peak of Slioch (980m) rises majestically from the north-western shores of Loch Maree. Around 800m of purple-red Torridonian sandstone soars skywards out of a bed of rounded, grey gneiss. When the buttressed flanks of the mountain reflect the evening sunlight, the effect is spellbinding. The mountain is well-named, the most likely meaning being 'spear'.

Unusually among mountain walks in most parts of Scotland, this one starts with a comparatively long walk to the start of the ascent, providing plenty of time to become imbued with the spirit of the place. This is, surely, far preferable to the usual routine of piling out of the car and heading straight up the path to the top. The route to Slioch follows the picturesque Kinlochewe River to Loch Maree, then climbs through wild moorland to the cluster of peaks that make up the Slioch massif. From the summit

## HEAVY INDUSTRY BESIDE LOCH MAREE

Anything remotely resembling industrial development around Loch Maree would be most unwelcome, of course, but rest assured, it all happened during a brief interlude at least 400 years ago.

On the way to Slioch you cross Abhainn an Fhasaigh; here, between the path and the shore of Loch Maree, largely hidden by thick heather, are the remains of a fairly primitive ironworks (buildings, hearths and furnaces). Using local bog iron ore (which occurs naturally in poorly drained ground), the works probably operated around the end of the 16th century. It is likely that the works helped to encourage entrepreneur George Hay to develop what was probably the first charcoal-fired blast furnace in Scotland, near Letterewe, about 3 miles west of Slioch. Hay shipped iron ore from Fife and felled most of the oak woodlands on the loch shore to produce charcoal. It isn't clear just what he did with the iron produced, but there were ready markets at home and abroad. All activity had ceased by about 1670, leaving the works to crumble almost to nothing, as well as a decimated oak wood and the seemingly incongruous place name 'Furnace' near Letterewe.

ridge, views range from the remote heart of the Great Wilderness to the Western Isles. The walk involves a total ascent of 1160m and crosses some rough ground.

## PLANNING When to Walk/Stalking

The route passes through the **Letterewe Estate** (☎ 01445-760311). Contact the estate for advice during its main stalking season, from mid-September to mid-November.

## Maps & Books

The OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 19 *Gairloch & Ullapool* covers this route. Consult the SMC's guide *The Munros* by Rab Anderson and Donald Bennet for background information.

## NEAREST TOWN Kinlochewe

Kinlochewe is a dot on the map in a magnificent location, at the foot of steep, dramatic Glen Docherty and near the head of Loch Maree, with views towards Slioch and the peaks of Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve. The nearest **tourist office** (☎ 0845 225 5121; gairloch@visitscotland.com; ☒ daily Easter-Sep, Mon-Sat Oct-Easter) is in Gairloch.

## SLEEPING & EATING

**Beinn Eighe Campsite** (☎ 01445-760254; free) is about 1.5 miles north of the village on the eastern side of the A832. Check the distance as there isn't a sign indicating the turn-off. Facilities are minimal but the setting is fantastic.

**Hill Haven B&B** (☎ 01445-760204; www.kinlochewe.info; s/d £33/56) is a friendly place, renowned for magnificent breakfasts.

**Kinlochewe Hotel & Bunkhouse** (☎ 01445-760253; www.kinlochewehotel.co.uk; dm/s/d £10/33/70, mains £9-11; ☒ lunch & dinner) offers a warm welcome. The bunkhouse has a kitchen, or you can have all meals in the hotel. In the bar, Isle of Skye beers are on tap, or you can try one of Harviestoun's or Heatherale's brews. The menu changes daily, so everything is freshly prepared; the steak and real ale pie, and the bean stew often appear by popular demand.

The **village shop** (☒ Mon-Sat, Sun 10am-1pm) sells maps, among other things. You can obtain cash from the post office.

There's another tiny shop and the **Tipsy Laird Coffee Shop** (☎ 01445-760227; mains £3-5; ☒ 10am-4pm Wed-Sun) is good for a quick snack; it's next to the petrol station, a little way north along the main road.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Westerbus** (☎ 01445-712255) operates a service between Inverness and Gairloch via Kinlochewe (1½ hours, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday). **Scotbus** (☎ 01463-224410; www.scotbus.co.uk) runs the same route (1½ hours, daily).

## GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Follow the A832 east from Kinlochewe for about 800m, then turn left along the signposted road to Incheril. Continue for 800m to the large car park at the end of the road.

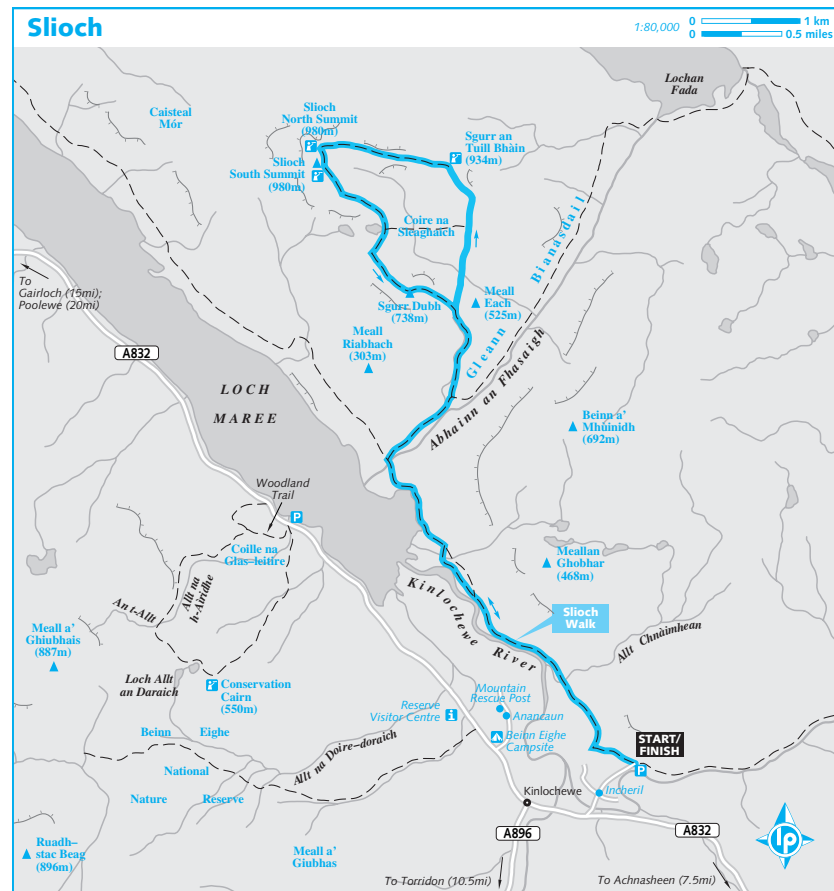
## THE WALK Incheril Car Park to Abhainn an Fhasaigh

1½ hours, 2.8 miles (4.5km)

From the cairn and plaque (about the Letterewe estate) on the northern side of the car park, go up the steps and through a gate. Turn left, following the sign 'Poolewe by Letterewe'. After a few minutes the track ends; continue along a path and soon go through a gate. The path leads on, past fields and through bracken to another gate, below which is a wide wooden bridge over Allt Chnámhean.

The well-worn path now climbs slightly, and in less than 10 minutes leads into the first of several lovely woodlands. Soon

you're down beside the river, and you catch sight of the mighty ramparts of Slioch for the first time. Just past the end of this woodland is a faint path junction. Bear right and cross grassland, soft in places, or continue straight on, through bracken, for a slightly longer, though generally better, path. The two paths unite a short distance beyond a stony burn. Further on, a short distance beyond another wooded area, you come to another fork. Bear left along a grassy path (a much easier route – the alternative is a nightmare!), generally close to the loch shore. Cross a pebble beach, pass through a silver birch grove and soon you come to the footbridge across thundering **Abhainn an Fhasaigh**.



## Abhainn an Fhasaigh to Slioch

3 hours, 3.4 miles (5.5km)

Go through a gap in the wire fence on the far side of the bridge and immediately turn right along a path that follows the burn upstream. After 150m the path turns sharply right; this is in fact a fork, which may be marked by a low cairn. Bear left, up across rock slabs and follow the clear path north-east, soon across generally flat ground. About 0.75 miles further on, bear left at a prominent junction, marked by a large cairn. The path leads more or less north, soon near a burn in the shallow depression between Meall Each and Sgurr Dubh.

At the col between these two hills, the main path veers west around the base of Sgurr Dubh directly towards Slioch. Continue north, however, over open ground across Coire na Sleaghaich. Cross the stream that runs down the middle of the corrie and climb the heathery lower slopes of the spur. Veer west to gain easier ground on a rocky shoulder then climb to **Sgurr an Tuill Bhàin** (934m). Enjoy a well-earned rest as you absorb the wonderful view north over Lochan Fada to the remote heart of the Great Wilderness.

Follow the path west from the summit, down onto a narrow ridge. The ridge widens as it climbs towards the northern summit of **Slioch**. In poor visibility stick to the northern edge of the ridge and you will be guided to the top. The northern and southern summits are actually the same height, although the south summit enjoys official status as the higher one. Views from both are stunning, with a panorama of Loch Maree below stretching out to the Atlantic Ocean, and the Western Isles visible on the horizon beyond. From the northern summit make a major change in direction, turning south and swinging slightly east around the top of a steep drop, to reach the trig point on Slioch's southern summit.

## Slioch to Incheril Car Park

3 hours, 5.6 miles (9km)

From the summit, descend southeast on a grassy slope. The path twists and turns through rocky ground; cross a rise and then veer further east to drop down the left side of a steep rocky spur and reach the col below, just east of a pair of lochans. The main path heads east into Coire na

Sleaghaich. To complete the full horseshoe, climb the rise to the south of the lochans, veering west slightly to pick up the path that descends to the broad col below Sgurr Dubh. A straightforward climb up the shoulder ahead brings you to the summit of **Sgurr Dubh** (738m). To descend, cross to the northeast side of the summit plateau and go down steeply towards Meall Each. Rejoin the main path at the bottom, turning south and retracing your route back to Loch Maree and the Incheril car park.

## MORE WALKS

### GLEN AFFRIC

Glen Affric, northeast of Glen Shiel, is considered to be the most beautiful glen in the Highlands with pristine Loch Affric and expanding areas of native pine woodlands.

From the village of Cannich, southwest of Inverness, a road leads to the eastern end of Loch Affric. A public right of way from there traverses the glen to **Glen Affric SYHA hostel** (☎ 0870 155 3255; dm £13; ☹ Apr-Oct). It continues to Morvich on Loch Duich, an inlet from the west coast, via Bealach an Sgàirne or Fionngleann and Gleann Lichd – an outstanding two-day walk. Along the way several fine mountains can occupy a day or three, notably Beinn Fhada (1032m) and Sgurr nan Ceathreamhnan (1151m). Near Morvich there's a good path northwards to the awesome Falls of Glomach.

The Harvey Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Kintail* covers most of this area. The relevant OS Landranger 1:50,000 maps are Nos 25 *Glen Carron & Glen Affric* and 33 *Loch Alsh, Glen Shiel & Loch Hourn*. The SMC guide *The Northwest Highlands* is recommended.

### CREAG MEAGAIHDH

Rising high above Loch Laggan, between the southern reaches of the Great Glen and Strathspey, is a small cluster of peaks dominated by the magnificent Creag Meagaidh (1130m). The peak is the central feature of Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve, owned and managed by SNH. The Creag Meagaidh horseshoe is one of Scotland's classic mountain walks, taking you round the spectacular, cliff-lined Coire Ardair. This 11.8-mile (19km) walk involves 1240m ascent and takes seven to 7½ hours. As

well as Craig Meagaidh, the route rewards Munro baggers with Carn Liath (1006m) and Stob Poite Coire Ardair (1053m).

The walk starts at a car park beside the A86, near SNH's Aberarder office, nearly 20 miles from Spean Bridge and 10 miles from Laggan Bridge. The nearest tourist offices for accommodation information are at **Aviemore** (☎ 0845 225 5121; www.visithighlands.com; The Mall) and **Fort William** (☎ 0845 225 5121; www.visithighlands.com; Cameron Sq; ☑).

The best times for the walk are mid-May to mid-June and September; access is generally open at all times but check with **SNH** (☎ 01528-544265) locally about stalking activities.

The OS Landranger 1:50,000 map for the walk is No 34 *Fort Augustus*. The SMC's *The Munros* by Rab Anderson and Donald Bennet, includes this walk, as does Lonely Planet's *Walking in Scotland*.

## THE GREAT WILDERNESS

### An Teallach

An Teallach (pronounced 'an chelluck') is one of Scotland's finest mountains, standing proudly on the edge of the Great Wilderness and a classic by any standard. Negotiating the trademark pinnacles involves some scrambling along a very exposed ridge; even by following the most cautious alternative paths, it's impossible to avoid crossing steep and exposed ground. For Munro baggers Sgurr Fiona (1060m) and Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill (1062m) can be ticked off here. The walk, best done from south to north, covers 11.5 miles (18.5km) and involves around 1350m of ascent; allow 7½ to 8½ hours.

In bad weather, wet rock and slippery ground make the route distinctly hazardous. Whatever the conditions, it is a serious route and should be tackled only if you have a lot of experience and are adept at scrambling in airy places.

The walk starts at the Corrie Hallie car park, 2 miles southeast of Dundonnell along the A832. Public transport is available to Dundonnell from Inverness with **Westerbus** (☎ 01445-712255) and **Scotbus** (☎ 01463-224410).

Accommodation is centred on the village of Dundonnell, at the east end of Little Loch Broom, about 60 miles west of Inverness on the A832. The nearest information sources are the **Ullapool tourist office** (☎ 0845 225 5121; www.visithighlands.com; 6 Argyle St) and **Gairloch tourist office** (☎ 0845 225 5121; www.visithighlands.com).

For this mountain, a large-scale map is preferable, so consult the OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 435 *An Teallach & Slioch*, and the SMC's guide *The Munros* by Rab Anderson and Donald Bennet.

### KNOYDART

Knoydart is a wild, rugged, virtually road-free area on the west coast, between Loch Nevis to the south and Loch Hourn to the north, and west of Loch Quoich at the head of Glen Garry. It's defined as much by these lochs and its remoteness as it is by the marvellous glens leading into and within its confines, notably Glen Dessary and Glen Barrisdale.

Strictly speaking, it lies outside the area we've delineated as the Western Highlands, but only just. Because it's so special (far more remote than the Great Wilderness with even fewer 'developments') it deserves to be at least mentioned in any survey of walking in Scotland.

The main attractions for walkers are the magnificent Munros, crowned by Ladhhar Behinn (1020m). The OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 33 *Loch Alsh, Glen Shiel & Loch Hourn* covers the area; the SMC's *The Munros* by Rab Anderson and Donald Bennet is your guide.

After long years of mismanagement and conflict, Knoydart is now cared for sympathetically by the **Knoydart Foundation** (www.knoydart-foundation.com) on behalf of the local community, the John Muir Trust and private individuals. The foundation's website will also lead you to the handful of accommodation providers on the peninsula. There's a **ferry** (www.knoydart-ferry.co.uk) from Mallaig to Inverie, Knoydart's only (and tiny) village. Mallaig, in turn, is served by First ScotRail trains and Scottish Citylink buses from Fort William.

# Isle of Skye

The Isle of Skye is blessed with some of the finest scenic splendour and variety in Britain, assets that have attracted writers, artists and travellers to the island for centuries. Since the early 20th century, walkers and climbers have also flocked to Skye to revel in the magnificent hill and coast walking. All manner of visitors also come in search of the island's mystical atmosphere, still little-diminished in many quiet corners, at a safe distance from the seemingly unstoppable growth of tourism and the building of new houses.

The Black Cuillin mountains are all about adrenalin-charged challenge and sublime mountain and sea vistas. Most of these airy peaks are the domain of walkers with experience in scrambling and a head for heights, and are beyond the scope of this book. However, there are a few walks where you can enjoy a close Cuillin encounter without confronting any vertiginous scrambling. In this chapter we describe one of these, a challenging route up Bruach na Frithe onto the Black Cuillin ridge. To prove that height isn't everything, the Coast & Cuillin walk, into the heart of the Black Cuillin, combines superb coast and mountain scenery.

The name Cuillin (pronounced 'coolin') is derived from the Norse *kjollen*, meaning 'keel-shaped'. The igneous Black Cuillin rocks are mainly gabbro, with sections of smooth basalt on the surface. Glacial action carved out the characteristic bowl-shaped corries and left behind the finely sculpted, jagged ridgeline.

Being rich in iron, the gabbro does strange things to magnetic compasses – a rather important consideration if you're intending to navigate by compass (see the boxed text, p405)!

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Venturing into the remote sanctuary of **Loch Coruisk** (p403)
- Finding your way along the airy ridge of **Bruach na Frithe** (p404) in the Black Cuillin
- Romping along the roller-coaster **Trotternish ridge** (p406)
- Not getting lost among the weird pinnacles of the **Quiraing** (p406)



## INFORMATION When to Walk

The main walking season on Skye starts around mid-April, perhaps later depending on the depth of snow on the mountains, and generally runs through until mid-October. However, even in midwinter the island can bask in bright (though scarcely warm) sunshine while much of the mainland is being blasted by bitter easterly winds.

## Maps

Both the walks described here are covered by Ordnance Survey (OS) Landranger 1:50,000 map No 32 *South Skye & Cuillin Hills*. The OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 411 *Cuillin Hills* and Harvey's Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Skye: The Cuillin* give greater detail of the Bruach na Frithe walk.

## Books

*Skye & the North West Highlands* by John Brooks and Neil Wilson covers 15 varied walks on Skye. The Ramblers' Association's *Guide to the Isle of Skye* by noted gear expert and wilderness walker Chris Townsend

describes 30 walks that range from easy strolls to challenging Cuillin scrambles. *Isle of Skye Including Raasay* by Paul Williams concentrates on walks at the easier end of the spectrum. *Skye 360, Walking the Coastline of Skye* by Andrew Dempster is a personalised account of a month-long journey with just enough detail to follow in his footsteps. *A Long Walk on the Isle of Skye* by David Paterson, in coffee-table format, offers a description of his walk, inspired by his superb photos.

## Guided Walks

**Highland Council's countryside rangers** (☎ 01471-822905; Old Corry Industrial Estate, Broadford) run varied programs of guided walks, with particular emphasis on Skye's natural heritage, from Easter until October. Pick up a brochure at local tourist offices.

**Cuillin Guides** (☎ 01478-640280; www.cuillin-guides.co.uk; Glenbrittle) has years of solid experience behind it and an unrivalled knowledge of the hills. Its program includes five days of ridge walking and scrambling with a guide-to-client ration of 1:5; the staff are qualified mountain leaders.

## Information Sources

VisitScotland's comprehensive www.visithighlands.com website is a good place to start, especially for accommodation bookings. On the island, there are tourist offices in **Portree** (☎ 01478-612137; Bayfield House, Bayfield Rd; ☎ daily Jun-Sep, Mon-Sat Oct-May; 🚗) and **Broadford** (☎ 01471-822361; The Car Park; ☎ daily Apr-Oct, Mon-Sat Nov-Mar).

## GETTING AROUND

Highland Country Buses operates an island-wide network of services linking Kyleakin (just across the bridge from Kyle of Lochalsh on the mainland), Broadford and Portree, as well as some outlying areas. Some services are very limited or nonexistent on Sundays.

## GATEWAY

Broadford is the natural gateway for the walks in this chapter, though the 'capital' of Skye is Portree, further north, with a greater range of accommodation and restaurants. Daily Scottish Citylink bus services from Inverness and Glasgow (via Fort William) pass through Broadford en route to Portree.



## COAST & CUILLIN

<b>Duration</b>	8 hours
<b>Distance</b>	13.5 miles (21.5km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate
<b>Start</b>	Elgol (opposite)
<b>Finish</b>	Sligachan (opposite)
<b>Transport</b>	bus

**Summary** A spectacular, low-level route that penetrates into the heart of the Black Cuillin to reach the shores of Loch Coruisk. The route also involves the Bad Step, a short, exposed rock section that some walkers may find problematic.

This low-level route combines coastal paths, mountain views, glen scenery and a short scramble to reach Loch Coruisk in the heart of the Black Cuillin. The section from Elgol to Loch Coruisk is particularly impressive and has justifiably been described as 'possibly the best coastal walk in Britain'.

Loch Coruisk is the jewel in the crown of the Black Cuillin. The jagged ring of peaks that surrounds the loch forms an impressive fortress and a wild setting for its clear blue waters. Boats can be used to access the loch by sea but, without mountaineering skills, there are only three possible routes in to Loch Coruisk on foot. This walk links two of these routes (the other path is more tenuous and leads in from Glenbrittle camp site, to the west).

There is a catch – the route described involves one section of scrambling that may not be to everyone's liking. The Bad Step, about 500m short of Loch Coruisk, is a 6m-

long, 60-degree slab with a narrow ledge for the feet and small handholds for support. It is exposed but because it's about 8m above deep water, it's not necessarily dangerous if you can swim well! It should be within the capabilities of most fit walkers, but a cool head is required and heavy packs may also increase the difficulty.

If the idea of the Bad Step is too daunting, there are a couple of options to avoid it – see Alternatives (below) for details.

### PLANNING

This walk is best done from south to north for two reasons: transport logistics are easier; and the views in this direction are really stunning.

To really appreciate the magnificent surroundings of the Black Cuillin, it is preferable to split the walk into two days and camp on the shores of Loch Coruisk, completing the walk to Sligachan on the second day. There is also a bothy at Camasunary but tenting at the loch is much more memorable. This is wild terrain and you will need to be entirely self-sufficient.

### Alternatives

If the prospect of the Bad Step is completely off-putting, there is another way to reach Loch Coruisk. From Elgol, **Bella Jane Boat Trips** (☎ 0800 731 3089; www.bellajane.co.uk) travel to the landing steps at the loch, a trip of about 45 minutes. From here you can walk the 7.5 miles out to Sligachan, following the walk description from Loch Coruisk to the finish. This option would fit easily into a day and make for a very memorable trip.

### SKYE IN TRUST

A good deal of south Skye and the Cuillin mountains is owned and managed by the John Muir Trust (JMT), a conservation organisation that owns and manages several other areas in Scotland. The trust's three separate, but contiguous, estates total around 0.5 sq miles of mountainous and rural Skye. They include several small and active crofting communities, which are directly involved in managing their estates, with a wealth of archaeological sites and plant and animal species.

The first purchase, the Torrin Estate, was made in 1991. Three years later, the much larger and adjoining Strathaird Estate was acquired, ensuring the preservation of land extending into the heart of the Cuillin, including Glen Sligachan, Loch Coruisk and the peaks of Bla Bheinn (an outlier of the Black Cuillin), Marsco and Ruadh Stac in the Red Cuillin. The later addition of the Sconser Estate brought more Red Cuillin summits under the JMT's control.

It could be said that the obvious gap in the JMT's Isle of Skye portfolio is the Black Cuillin mountains themselves. However, their current and future ownership is the subject of a drawn-out and highly controversial debate (see the boxed text, p403).

Alternatively, follow the first part of the route described to Camasunary and then continue straight up Glen Sligachan to Sligachan. A sign on the wall of the house at Camasunary directs you up the glen and the path is generally good. The total distance is 11 miles (17.5km); allow about six hours.

### NEAREST TOWNS Elgol

This tiny village, dependent on fishing and visitors, sits close to the end of the Strathaird peninsula with an incredible view of the Cuillin across Loch Scaivag.

### SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation isn't exactly plentiful, so you'll need to book well ahead to be sure of a roof over your head.

**Rose Croft** (☎ 01471-866377; www.isleofskye.net/rosecroft; s/d £30/44) is a long-established and friendly B&B with a beautiful garden and lovely views. A light evening meal (£6) is available by arrangement.

**Rowan Cottage** (☎ 01471-866287; www.rowan-cottage-skye.co.uk; 9 Glasnakeil by Elgol; s/d £30/60, dinner £20-23) is a traditional cottage with pleasingly furnished rooms a couple of miles along a narrow, winding road east of Elgol.

**Coruisk House** (☎ 01471-866330; www.seafood-skye.co.uk; s/d £38/76, mains £10-25; ☺ lunch & dinner; ☑) is a restaurant northeast of the village with rooms in what was originally a thatched cottage to which travellers were first welcomed a century ago. These days, historic photos adorn the walls, the bedrooms are superbly decorated and the restaurant specialises in locally caught fish and seafood, though without neglecting vegetarians.

**Cuillin View Gallery & Coffee Shop** (snacks to £3; ☺ lunch), above the harbour, is licensed and offers sandwiches and home baking, and the chance to contemplate the work of local artists – and the eponymous view.

The **Post Office Shop** (☺ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) carries basic supplies and does home baking and hot and cold drinks.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Highland Country Buses** (☎ 01463-710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) operates a bus service from the Broadford post office to the Elgol post office (40 minutes, two services Tuesday and Thursday). This is supplemented by the **Royal Mail Postbus** (☎ 08457 740740; www.postbus

.royalmail.com) service (one hour, two services Monday to Friday, one Saturday). The long-distance service covered under Sligachan (below) passes through Broadford.

The A881 to Elgol branches from the A850 Kyleakin–Portree road in the small town of Broadford. There's a car park at the bottom of the first steep descent to the harbour and more parking space opposite the nearby village hall.

### Sligachan

Historic Sligachan is just a large hotel, a bunkhouse, camping ground and a bus stop. It has been the gateway to the Cuillin for more than a century and seethes with activity during summer; in fact it's rarely quiet here. Bring all your supplies as you'll search in vain for a shop.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Sligachan Campsite** (☎ 01478-650204; sites for 2 £8), opposite the hotel at the head of Loch Sligachan, enjoys an outstanding setting.

**Sligachan Bunkhouse** (☎ 01478-650204; www.sligachan.co.uk; dm £10), on the eastern side of the main road, has that all-important Skye facility – a good drying room.

**Sligachan Hotel** (☎ 01478-650204; www.sligachan.co.uk; s/d £48/96) is a must, if only for a look at the walls of historic photos of early climbers. The comfortable rooms have either mountain or loch views and you can eat in lively **Seamus' Bar** (breakfast £6-8, mains £6-12; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) or go upmarket at **Cairidh Seafood Restaurant** (mains £12-18; ☺ lunch & dinner).

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Scottish Citylink** (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk) bus services from Glasgow, via Fort William to Portree, stop at Sligachan (six hours, three daily), as does the Inverness–Portree service (three hours, three daily).

A highly recommended variation from Inverness is to take the outstandingly scenic **First ScotRail** (☎ 0845 755 0033; www.firstscotrail.com) train trip to Kyle of Lochalsh (2½ hours, four services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) then connect with the local **Highland Country Buses** (☎ 01463-710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) service to Portree via Sligachan (40 minutes, at least four services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday).

By car, Sligachan is 23 miles from the once-controversial Skye Bridge.



## THE WALK Elgol to Camasunary

2 hours, 3.5 miles (5.5km)

The walk begins about 300m northeast of Elgol post office, along a lane leading north from the A881, and clearly signposted as a footpath to Camasunary and Sligachan. The road soon disappears, leaving a track that ends at two houses. A footpath (signed to Loch Coruisk) continues directly ahead, between the fences of the two houses, and passes through a gate, leading out onto open hillside. The views are immediately impressive: the Small Isles of Eigg, Rum and Canna lie to the south, while the Black Cuillin ridge dominates the skyline to the northwest.

The well-trodden path contours across grassy, heathery slopes all the way to the beach at Camasunary, with views improving along the way. The drop-off to the west is steep in places as the lower slopes of Ben Cleat and Beinn Leacach are passed, and care is required over these sections. At Glen Scaladal, cross a stile before descending to the pebbly cove, then climb steeply to the broken cliff top from the back of the beach. Duck under the branches of a grove of stunted trees, and follow a track climbing slightly higher up the cliff. Easier ground then leads down to the bridge over the Abhainn nan Leac and a substantial junction of paths, about 3 miles from Elgol.

Of the two buildings at **Camasunary**, the larger house near the bridge is privately owned. The smaller building, 500m further west, is the Mountain Bothies Association (MBA) bothy, which provides free accommodation for walkers and climbers. At the junction of paths, the 4WD track that descends from the shoulder to the east leads to Kirkibost, about 2 miles away. The path that forks right between the bridge and house leads directly up Glen Sligachan to Sligachan, avoiding Loch Coruisk.

## Camasunary to Loch Coruisk

2 hours, 2.5 miles (4km)

To continue to Loch Coruisk, take the path that leads west (left at the fork) along the top of the beach and passes in front of the bothy. Ford the Abhainn Camas Fhionnairigh by following its banks upstream for 100m or so and then crossing on stepping stones. The path on the other side climbs slightly to contour round the craggy

lower slopes of Sgurr na Stri. The terrain is rougher than previously, and you have to cross several rock steps and angled slabs. As you round the headland another wonderful vista greets the eye; rocky islands nestle at the mouth of the River Scaivaig, backed by the looming Cuillin peaks.

The slabs become more numerous as the path veers north and care must be taken not to lose the main route as it splits in various places. Continue towards the white sand and turquoise water of Loch nan Leachd cove. The notorious **Bad Step** is the very last slab that needs to be negotiated before the beach. A cairn marks the stony path that descends to the difficulties. It could be a good idea to undo pack straps, just in case of a slip into the water below. Duck under an overhang and scramble out onto the seaward rock face. Pull yourself up to balance on a ledge that skirts round the slab face, using handholds for support. Shuffle along and at a convergence of fault lines take care to drop diagonally down to the boulders on the beach rather than continuing up the slab.

Cross the boulders to the sand of Loch nan Leachd and follow the path inland across the low saddle at the back of the cove. **Loch Coruisk** is suddenly revealed in all its glory and its banks make a fine rest spot. If you are spending the night here, flat ground for camping can be found just

over the stepping stones that cross the River Scaivaig.

## Loch Coruisk to Sligachan

4 hours, 7.5 miles (12km)

The path from Loch Coruisk to Sligachan leads round the southeastern shore of the loch, and then climbs up the right-hand side of a burn that can be seen tumbling down from a smaller loch above. It is a climb of over 300m to the saddle and the terrain is rocky towards the top. A large cairn marks the saddle and there are fine views west over the serrated north Cuillin ridge. Veer northwest along the ridge to a second cairn 20m away, where a wide, stony path drops down the other side. The path from Camasunary to Sligachan can be seen winding along the valley below. The descent to join it is fairly steep for a section and then evens out, becoming rather wet at the valley floor. Join the main Sligachan path at a large cairn, from where there is a great perspective of Bla Bheinn to the southeast.

From the junction of paths it is about 3.7 miles along the valley to Sligachan. The terrain is largely flat and the going easy, although the Sligachan Hotel soon comes into view and it can seem like a long time before it moves much closer. The final 500m of the route is along a well-made path. Beyond a gate, turn left across the old bridge to arrive at the hotel.

## MOUNTAINS FOR SALE?

During the early part of 2000, John MacLeod (chief of the Clan MacLeod) put the Black Cuillin mountains on sale for an asking price of £10 million. Typical of the local reactions reported in the press was the comment of a young lass: 'You cannae sell a mountain'. Environmental and outdoor interest groups were horrified by rumours that wealthy outsiders had expressed interest in purchasing the range. Some feared that the Black Cuillin would be turned into a theme park, or that the long tradition of open access to the mountains would be threatened. The islanders were angered by MacLeod's assumption of title and believed that he should not profit from the sale, and it was unclear whether he actually owned the mountains anyway. MacLeod himself said he needed the money to repair the roof of Dunvegan Castle, one of the island's main tourist drawcards.

The property was later withdrawn, pending an investigation by the Crown Estate Commission (which looks after state-owned land) into the legal title to the mountains. However, it decided not to contest MacLeod's claim and he promptly put the estate back on the market. In July 2001 he offered to give the Cuillin to the nation in exchange for acceptable arrangements to restore his castle. At the time of research, eight organisations were still immersed in an assessment of what needed to be done to the castle; the community at large was to be consulted about looking after the mountains. As one participant observed, 'It is likely to be some time' before the whole thing is sorted out.

## BRUACH NA FRÌTHE

<b>Duration</b>	6–7 hours
<b>Distance</b>	8.5 miles (13.5km)
<b>Difficulty</b>	moderate–demanding
<b>Start/Finish</b>	Sligachan (p401)
<b>Transport</b>	bus

**Summary** A superb, energetic outing with spectacular views of the Black and Red Cuillin, and the chance of some exciting scrambling on the northwest ridge if you are cool-headed and experienced.

Bruach na Frithe (pronounced ‘broo-uch na free-ha’) is a turning point on the main Cuillin ridge and provides magnificent views of the range’s outstanding rock architecture. At 958m (3142ft) this Munro has been described as the least difficult of the Black Cuillin peaks to climb, being the only one not defended by cliffs. The easiest route is up (and down) Fionn Choire, a steep-sided bowl, following a steep, zigzagging path up through scree and boulder slopes, avoiding all scrambling. The approach is along a right of way from Sligachan to Glenbrittle, over Bealach a’ Mhàim (continuing through the pass to Glenbrittle would provide an option in poor weather). The walk involves almost 1000m of ascent.

### IT’S ATTITUDE THAT MATTERS

Standing on the summit of Bruach na Frithe on a good day, it is difficult to imagine that the Black Cuillin were regarded as unattainable until the early 19th century. Between then and now, when people regularly traverse the entire Cuillin ridge, some even making nonstop traverses of the Greater Cuillin (including Bla Bheinn), lies a fundamental shift in attitude. It wasn’t modern climbing gear, boots or clothing that made the difference, but the development of a new approach to the mountains.

In 1835, Reverend Lesingham Smith and local forester Duncan Macintyre visited Loch Coruisk and returned to Sligachan by scrambling across the ramparts of the Drùim nam Ramh ridge into Harta Corrie. The following year, James Forbes hired Macintyre as a guide and together they made the first recorded ascent of Sgurr nan Gilleann by the now popular (but still tricky) southeast ridge.

With the psychological barrier broken, local men quickly knocked off the other Cuillin peaks, with Sheriff Alexander Nicolson claiming the first ascent of Sgurr Alasdair, the highest summit on Skye (993m). In 1859 a British Admiralty surveyor, Captain Wood, mapped the south Cuillin and identified a pinnacle at 986m as being unclimbable. It only needed that tag to ensure that the first ascent of what is now known as the Inaccessible Pinnacle soon followed. Today it is one of the most popular climbing challenges in the Black Cuillin (partly because it’s a Munro), involving one pitch of easy, if airy, rock climbing and a short abseil.

The first traverse of the Black Cuillin ridge fell to Shadbolt and Maclaren in 1911, taking nearly 17 hours. It has since been completed in less than 25% of that time.

## PLANNING Alternatives

If you’re happy to tackle an easy scramble, which is airy in places, an attractive alternative is to ascend Bruach na Frithe by the northwest ridge. The impression of exposure is exhilarating. See the Alternative Route on opposite for details.

## THE WALK Sligachan to the Base of Fionn Choire

1½–2 hours, 2.5 miles (4km)

The walk begins about 500m along the A863 Dunvegan road. You can either walk along the road from Sligachan, or use the small car park on the south side of the road, beside the path.

From the car park, follow the track signed ‘Footpath to Glenbrittle’ that heads towards Alltdearg House. A signed footpath diverts you north of the house, crossing a stretch of boggy ground. The firmest route keeps near to the fence on the left.

You soon pick up a stony path that runs alongside the Allt Dearg Mòr, a burn that tumbles down a series of rock ledges. After 2 miles the path begins to level out in Coire na Circe and the going becomes soft underfoot. Continue on, fording a sizable tributary, to reach a large cairn. Here the path for Bruach na Frithe forks left across

boggy ground and crosses another burn (more easily) about 200m after the cairn. Follow the ascending path for about 20 minutes, keeping Allt an Fionn Choire (a burn with small waterfalls pouring from the corrie above) on your left, until you reach a substantial cairn on top of a rock slab. This is a good place for a rest while you decide which route to take to the summit.

## Base of Fionn Choire to Bruach na Frithe

2–2½ hours, 1.5 miles (2.5km)

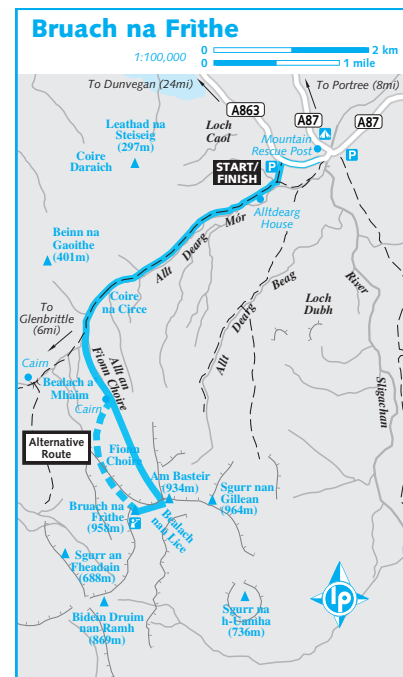
From the large cairn, stay on the narrow cairned path to the right (west) of the burn. After ascending a short way the path reaches the sill at the corrie’s edge. You need to cross the burn to reach a large cairn on the other side; this may be easier above a burn junction. From this cairn there is no discernible path but you can pick out a line of small cairns swinging slightly left across the corrie floor towards some rock slabs in the scree ahead.

After crossing this level stretch a small path ascends to the left of a dry stream bed in a small gorge, where the burn has disappeared below boulders. There are no cairns but an obvious path roughly follows the left-hand side of the burn. Where the ground steepens the route zigzags up the scree and boulders to reach the ridge at **Bealach nan Lice**. Turn right and follow a distinct path around the base of a pinnacle and onto the final rocky ridge leading to the summit of **Bruach na Frithe** (958m), marked by a distinctive cylindrical trig point. On a clear day the view is one of the best on Skye.

## ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: BRUACH NA FRÌTHE VIA THE NORTHWEST RIDGE

2–2½ hours, 2 miles (3km)

From the cairn on top of the rock slab, head up the steep slope of grass, boulders and scree on the right, on a south-to-southwest bearing, with occasional cairns to guide



you. Climb the steep slope to the left and join a more obvious path (which has come up from Bealach a’ Mhàim). This zigzags up steep scree and then grass to a narrowing of the ridge and a short section of easier grade.

Then comes a short, steep ascent to an almost-horizontal narrow section about 150m long. This is a superb situation if you have a head for heights. At the end of this is the main ridge scramble. Difficulties encountered near the ridge crest can be avoided by going to the right, but don’t drop too far below the crest or you’ll have difficulty climbing back up further on. It’s easy enough to pick out the routes that have been taken by those who have gone before,

### WATCH YOUR COMPASS

The magnetic properties of the Black Cuillin gabbro rock distort compass readings, so this small piece of equipment is virtually useless. Thus you must rely on your map-reading skills, or GPS bearings and/or route-notes interpretation on cloudy days. If you are a bit uncertain in these areas, ensure that the weather is fine and settled for your climb. Even then, extreme caution is necessary as the mountain climate is notoriously changeable.

and with the occasional use of hands for balance and to help with upward progress you should reach the summit of **Bruach na Frithe** with a great feeling of exhilaration and achievement (or perhaps just relief). Either way, enjoy the superb views and check your compass to see for yourself how the gabbro affects the needle!

### **Bruach na Frithe to Sligachan**

2½ hours, 4.5 miles (7km)

The descent retraces the main route. From the summit take the east ridge, keeping close to the crest but avoiding obstacles by passing them on their left. Pass below Sgurr a' Fionn Choire to reach Bealach nan Lice, about 400m from (and 60m below) the summit. Turn left down a stony path into Fionn Choire. There is a burn on the left (west) but this disappears in places. In mist the route can be confusing, but it's best to stick to a reverse of the route described earlier. This will lead you back to the path on the northwest side of the Allt Dearg Mór and then down to Sligachan.

## MORE WALKS

### **TROTTERNISH PENINSULA** **The Trotternish Traverse**

The Trotternish Peninsula, forming the northern end of Skye, is dominated by a 15-mile-long precipitous escarpment

snaking almost its full length. A 14-mile (22.5km), seven-to-eight-hour traverse starts at the Storr Woodlands car park (6.5 miles north of Portree). The route passes the iconic pinnacle of the Old Man of Storr then climbs to the Storr (719m), the peninsula's highest point. It then traverses the sharply undulating ridge to finish at the Quiraing road between Staffin and Uig; by then you'll have coped with 1450m of ascent. The car park on the Quiraing road is about 3 miles northwest of the village of Staffin, where there's a reasonable range of accommodation and a few cafés. OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 408 *Trotternish & The Storr* covers the area. The walk is described fully in Lonely Planet's *Walking in Scotland*.

### **The Quiraing**

The pinnacles, cliffs and landslides of the Quiraing are a compact and easily explored example of the features that make the Trotternish peninsula so spectacular. A 3.5-mile (5.6km) circuit of around 2¾ hours, following generally good paths, leads past Meall Na Suirmach (543m), down through a pass and past fantastic pinnacles and steep cliffs. It starts and finishes at an informal car park on the Quiraing road, about 3 miles northwest of Staffin. OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 408 *Trotternish & The Storr* covers the walk, which is described fully in Lonely Planet's *Walking in Scotland*.

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