

Wester Ross

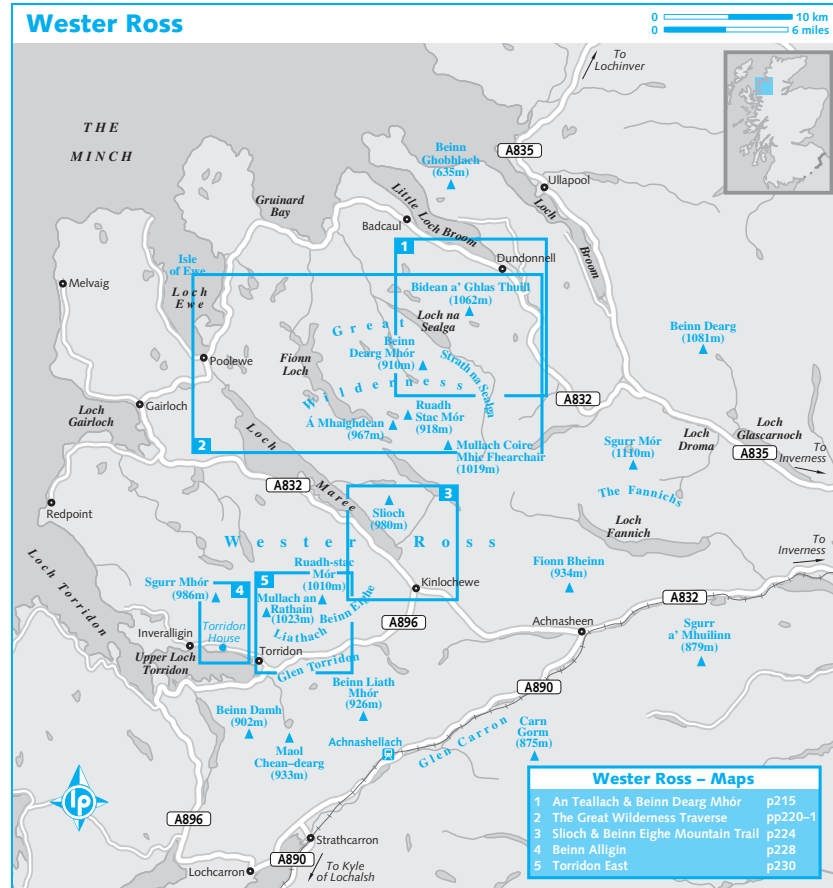
Wester Ross is heaven for hillwalkers: a remote and starkly beautiful part of the Highlands with lonely glens and lochs, an intricate coastline of rocky headlands and white-sand beaches, and some of the finest mountains in Scotland. If you are lucky with the weather, the clear air will provide rich colours and great views from the ridges and summits. In poor conditions the remoteness of the area makes walking a much more serious proposition. Whatever the weather, the walking can be difficult, so this is no place to begin learning mountain techniques. But if you are fit and well equipped, Wester Ross will be immensely rewarding – and addictive.

The walks described here offer a tantalising taste of the area's delights and challenges. An Teallach's pinnacle-encrusted ridge is one of Scotland's finest ridge walks, spiced with some scrambling. Proving that there's much more to walking in Scotland than merely jumping out of the car (or bus) and charging up the nearest mountain, Beinn Dearg Mhór, in the heart of the Great Wilderness – great by Scottish standards at least – is big enough to guarantee peace, even solitude, during a superb two-day traverse through glens cradling beautiful lochs. Slioch, a magnificent peak overlooking Loch Maree, offers a comparatively straightforward, immensely scenic ascent. In the renowned Torridon area, Beinn Alligin provides an exciting introduction to its considerable challenges, epitomised in the awesome traverse of Liathach, a match for An Teallach in every way. And to recover from this expenditure of adrenaline, we recommend the gentle walk to one of Scotland's finest corries, Coire Mhic Fhearchair.

WESTER ROSS

HIGHLIGHTS

- Revelling in the scrambling along the lofty ridges of **An Teallach** (p214) and **Liathach** (p229)
- Losing track of time in the remote and spectacular **Great Wilderness** (p218)
- Looking for hobbits in the Caledonian woodland of the **Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve** (p225)
- Being knocked sideways by the views of Scotland's west coast from atop the **Horns of Alligin** (p228)
- www.visithighlands.com



WESTER ROSS

INFORMATION

Maps & Books

OS Travel – Road 1:250,000 map No 3 *Western Scotland* provides an excellent topographic overview of the region.

The Scottish Mountaineering Club's *Hillwalkers' Guide North-West Highlands* by Dave Broadhead, Alec Keith and Ted Maden is exhaustive (but not exhausting!) and the best source of comprehensive background information. For more specialised enlightenment about the landscape you can't do better than *Northwest Highlands, A Landscape Fashioned by Geology*, published by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the British Geological Survey. It's well illustrated and anything but dry and aca-

demically straightforward walking guides include *Skye & the North West Highlands* by John Brooks and Neil Wilson, which describes a range of low-level and easy routes in the area.

Information Sources

VisitScotland (☎ 0845 225 5121; www.visithighlands.com) is the main resource for accommodation information and reservations in the area.

Traveline Scotland (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.travelinescotland.com) provides full timetable details. Alternatively, the **Highland Council** (☎ 01463 702660; public.transport@highland.gov.uk) *Wester Ross & Lochalsh* public transport timetable is a handy reference.

AN TEALLACH

Duration	7½–8½ hours
Distance	11.5 miles (18.5km)
Difficulty	demanding
Start/Finish	Corrie Hallie
Nearest Town	Dundonnell (right)
Transport	bus

Summary A challenging mountain walk involving a scramble along an airy, pinnacle-encrusted ridge, with spectacular, wide-ranging views.

The jagged ridge and rock pinnacles of An Teallach are a landmark in Wester Ross. The peak is a true classic among Scottish mountains, and one of the more serious undertakings. Negotiating the pinnacles involves some scrambling along a very exposed ridge, so a cool head and confidence, born of experience in such places, is essential. Several walkers have suffered fatal injuries in falls from the ridge, so save An Teallach for a fine, dry day. It makes for a strenuous day out, with a total ascent of 1370m.

An Teallach (pronounced ‘an chelluck’) means ‘the forge’, a name that bears no relation to its shape but comes from the mountain’s red Torridonian sandstone, which glows like a blacksmith’s fire in the setting sun. This sandstone is also a scrambler’s delight, providing plenty of friction. The most difficult part of the ridge is the notorious 10m-high ‘bad step’. It’s possible to avoid almost all the scrambling by using paths skirting the base of the pinnacles, and you can choose if and when to venture onto the rocky ridge. Even by taking the most cautious paths, it’s still impossible to complete the walk without crossing some steep and exposed ground.

The traverse is described in a clockwise direction, which means scrambling up, rather than down, the most difficult parts of the ridge. Paths on the high ground are well worn, making navigation in mist relatively straightforward. A short rope may be handy if you’re familiar with the techniques required to use it safely.

PLANNING

When to Walk/Stalking

An Teallach is within **Eilean Darach Estate** (☎ 01854 633203), where stalking tradition-

ally takes place between mid-August and mid-October.

Maps

Os Landranger 1:50,000 map No 19 *Gairloch & Ullapool* and OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 435 *An Teallach & Slioch* cover the walk.

NEAREST TOWN

Dundonnell

☎ 01854 / pop 170

Dundonnell is more of a locality than a distinct village, spread out along the south-western shore of Little Loch Broom and dramatically overlooked by the outlying cliffs of An Teallach. The nearest ATMs are in Gairloch (between Kinlochewe and Poolewe) or Ullapool.

SLEEPING & EATING

Sàil Mhór Croft Hostel (☎ 633224; www.sailmhor.co.uk; Camusnagaul; dm £11, breakfast £5) is 2 miles west of Dundonnell on the A832. Long established and family-run, the owners are very knowledgeable about the surrounding mountains.

Badrallach (☎ 633281; www.badrallach.com; Croft 9, Badrallach; unpowered sites for 2 £7, bothy £6, caravan for 2 £40, B&B £25, dinner £25) is 7 miles along a narrow single-track road off the A832, 1 mile east of Dundonnell Hotel. With something for everyone, from a grassy pitch to luxury B&B and dinner with the family, Badrallach is in a class of its own.

Dundonnell Hotel (☎ 633204; www.dundonnellhotel.com; s £35-45, d £70-90, mains £7-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) is superbly furnished and most rooms have glen or loch views. You’ll eat well in the Broombeg bar, where the menu reflects an imaginative approach to standard dishes.

Dundonnell Stores (☎ Mon-Sat), the only shop, is actually 5.5 miles west at Durnamuck, half a mile along the Badcaul road from the A832.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Westerbus (☎ 01445 712255) operates a bus service between Inverness and Gairloch via Dundonnell (£7, one hour 40 minutes, one service Monday, Wednesday and Saturday), stopping outside the hotel. The driver will also stop elsewhere if you ask nicely.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Corrie Hallie parking area is 2 miles south of Dundonnell on the eastern side of the A832. The Westerbus driver may drop you here with sufficient notice.

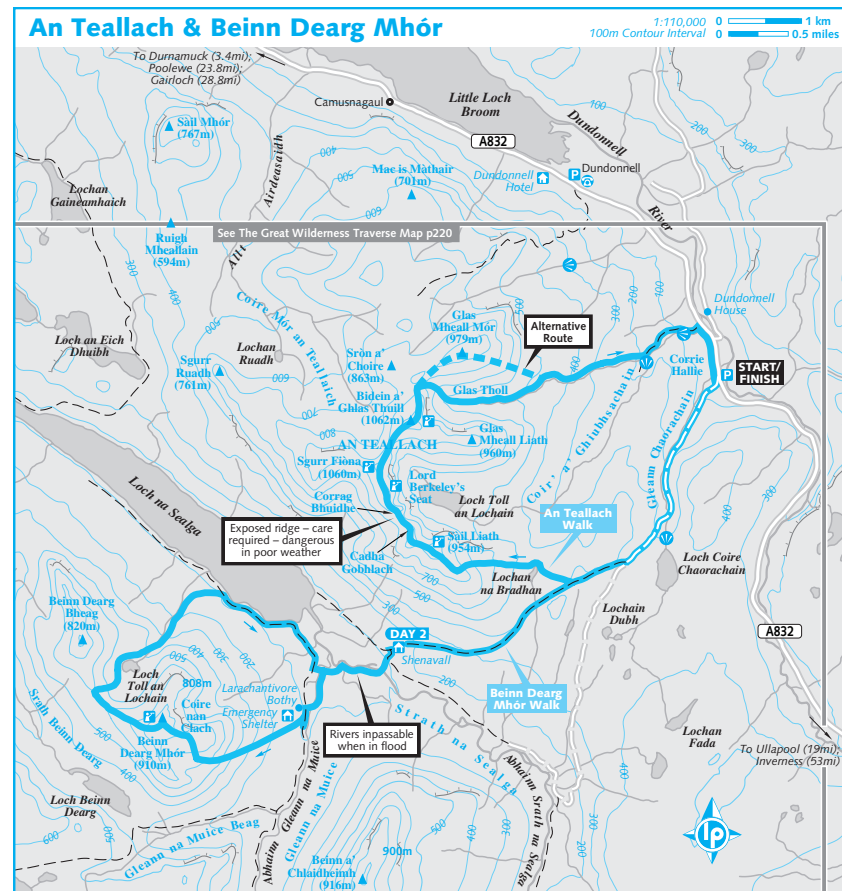
THE WALK

Map below

From Corrie Hallie cross the road and follow the track signposted to Kinlochewe. Go through a gate and follow the track up through a grove of silver birch. About 1.2 miles out, cross a footbridge. Soon the track zigzags up the hill beside the burn to a cairn, about 100m beyond which, two smaller cairns mark a path to the right. After 800m it crosses a hollow, and the most direct route up An Teallach leaves the established path

(which leads on to the bothy at Shenavall) and heads west across open ground. Pass **Lochan na Bradhan** then head straight up the shoulder of Sàil Liath, or you can avoid the scree by following a grassy slope towards the north of the shoulder. This steep route is slippery when wet; there’s a slightly more gradual line further to the south.

Join the ridge and turn northwest up the rocky slope to the summit cairn on **Sàil Liath** (954m). The wonderful panorama extends southwest to Beinn Dearg Mhór, and nearby Loch Toll an Lochain far below is framed dramatically by an impressive amphitheatre of buttresses. A worn path leads along the ridge from here; descend to the west to the steep, exposed ridge – a taste of things to



SCRAMBLING

Between the world of walking and the world of rock climbing there is a region of increasing exposure, increasing verticality and increasing adrenaline. Scrambling is the term used for sections of a route that require the significant use of hands for balance and to move upwards. It may be a small rock-step on an otherwise easy ridge, it might be a knife-edge narrowing on a ridge or, at the extreme end, it could be several hundred feet of quite steep rock. Essentially, scrambling ends where technical rock climbing begins. Mostly scrambling depends on your head for heights, and previous climbing experience helps a great deal. Most scramblers go without ropes but they do offer reassurance on harder moves, provided they're used correctly.

The Anonach Eagach (p139), Ben Nevis via Carn Mór Dearg Arête (p127) and An Teallach (p214) walks are classic scrambling routes, while the Ring of Steall (p128) walk and the Beinn Alligin (p227) horseshoe provide less-challenging introductions to the art. Any route will be that much harder if the rock is wet or the wind is strong. Pick dry, calm days for scrambles and enjoy the friction. Hiring a guide would be a good way to get going. Alternatively, take one of the courses run at the National Outdoor Training Centre at **Glenmore Lodge** (☎ 01479 861256; www.glenmorelodge.org.uk) near Aviemore. For guidance, chase up *The Hillwalkers Guide to Mountaineering* by Stuart Johnston, and for a fund of ideas *Classic Mountain Scrambles in Scotland* by Andrew Dempster is your guide.

come. Drop down to a narrow gap, climb to a minor peak and then descend once more into Cadha Gobhlach, from where there's a very steep escape route, down to Loch Toll an Lochain, if necessary.

Another steep ascent leads to a wall of slabs across the main ridge; a path to the left bypasses all the difficulties between here and Sgurr Fhiona. If you're happy to scramble, the first slabs are best taken slightly around the corner to the left, leaving you on a ledge beneath the 'bad step'. Any progress back to the right along the true ridge line is barred by a very steep, intimidating rock step. The easiest route is straight up, across more slabs and rock steps. Once past this, an easy scramble puts you on top of the first of the **Corrag Bhuidhe pinnacles**. From here to Sgurr Fhiona, narrow paths on the left bypass all difficulties, though it's relatively easy to scramble up each of the pinnacles for views into Coire Toll an Lochain. The last pinnacle is the vertiginous, overhanging prow known as Lord Berkeley's Seat, again passed innocuously on the left (one to 1¼ hours from Corrag Bhuidhe).

The ground is slightly easier for the final ascent to the cairned summit of **Sgurr Fhiona** (1060m). From here the path descends over more loose, steep ground. Keep to the ridge as it curves northeast for the final, more gradual climb to **Bidein a' Ghlas Thuill** (1062m). On a clear day the Western Isles are visible out to sea, and everywhere else the incredible mountain landscape seems limitless.

Descend steeply north to a col then take a path to the east (marked by a small cairn), steeply down a gully to the beautiful secluded glen of Glas Tholl. Alternatively, to prolong the views, follow the ridge from the col north and northeast up to Glas Mheall Mór. Descend southeast to join the path from Glas Tholl glen. Follow the left bank of the burn downhill and an intermittent path soon becomes continuous. Stick close to the burn, and with the road near, cross some sandstone slabs then follow the marked path through rhododendrons and on to the road. Turn right for 650m to Corrie Hallie car park.

BEINN DEARG MHÓR

Duration	2 days
Distance	16 miles (25.5km)
Difficulty	moderate-demanding
Start/Finish	Corrie Hallie
Nearest Town	Dundonnell (p214)
Transport	bus

Summary A challenging circuit of a remote and spectacular peak. River crossings, steep slopes and a night at Shenavall Bothy make this a trip to remember.

Hidden away behind the vast bulk of An Teallach is a rugged, steep-sided glen cradling Loch na Sealga, near which stands Shenavall Bothy. On the south side of this

wild glen, the steep crown of Beinn Dearg Mhór (910m/2985ft) rises resplendent. A finely chiselled massif standing above the head of the loch, the mountain rises like a beacon to walkers.

Its challenging ascent involves steep slopes, several river crossings and tricky navigation if the weather is poor, so you need to be right up to the mark with these techniques and skills. The complete circuit from Corrie Hallie takes 10 to 11 hours, which could feasibly be fitted into a summer's day. However, this strenuous route really should be spread over two days with a night at or near Shenavall Bothy. The rivers are impassable even in minor flood so postpone your trip if possible during or just after heavy rain.

PLANNING

When to Walk/Stalking

The route passes through the **Eilean Darach Estate** (☎ 01854 633203), where the traditional stalking season is from mid-August to mid-October.

Maps

Use OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 435 *An Teallach & Slioch* or OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 19 *Gairloch & Ullapool*.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

To get to Corrie Hallie see p215.

THE WALK

Map p215

Day 1: Corrie Hallie to Shenavall

2 hours, 4 miles (6.5km)

From Corrie Hallie cross the road and take the vehicle track signposted to Kinlochewe. Pass through a gate and follow the track up through a grove of silver birch trees. The track fords a stream, and there is a wooden footbridge if water levels are high. The ground becomes steeper, the stream forms into a series of picturesque waterfalls, and the track zigzags up the hill beside it. The top of the climb is marked by a cairn and inspirational views of a wilderness of peaks and glens.

About 100m after the cairn, two smaller cairns mark a path to the right. This path is well worn, although after about 1.2km miles it passes the shoulder of Sàil Liath and the ground becomes wetter and rougher. Pick your way alongside a stream as the

path descends through a narrow valley to reach Shenavall and the bothy.

Shenavall Bothy is maintained by the Mountain Bothies Association and is open and free for all mountain users. It is simply a shell of an old stone house and has no facilities except a fireplace. It can serve as an alternative to camping, although you'll still need camping gear (sleeping mats and stove etc). If you do stay in the bothy (or camp near it), be sure to walk well upstream before collecting water – the bothy is very popular and there isn't a toilet, so the water nearby is definitely *not* drinkable.

Day 2: Shenavall to Corrie Hallie via Beinn Dearg Mhór

8 hours, 12 miles (19km)

The first challenge is to cross the two rivers that snake towards Loch na Sealga. If they're in spate, crossing will be impossible, but generally the water is calf- to knee-deep in the shallows and wading is cold but not difficult.

Leave Shenavall and cross Abhainn Srath na Sealga just southwest of the bothy. Stick to the river bank on the other side to avoid the worst of some very wet ground between the two rivers, then cross the bog to Abhainn Gleann na Muice. Follow its bank south and cross in front of the private Larachantivore Bothy, a place with a sad history (see the boxed text on p218). Close by is a small building, as the sign on the door says, for walkers' use in an emergency; this would be most welcome if you were coming from the west and the river was impassable. Once on the western bank of the Abhainn Gleann na Muice, start straightaway to traverse southwest up and across the steep eastern flanks of Beinn Dearg Mhór to reach a prominent gully and stone chute. Follow the chute to where it is bounded on the left by some small crags. Cross the chute and traverse left (south) above the crags, ascending gradually across boulder fields and heather to reach easier ground at the lip of a corrie (1½ to two hours from Larachantivore cottage). Immediately in front of you is an impressive cleft, where a few hardy ash trees grow from ledges in the rock walls. The route to the summit is now quite apparent and straightforward, but a promontory on the summit ridge hides the top.

TRAGEDY AT LARACHANTIVORE BOTHY *Fraser Mackenzie*

Near the present Larachantivore Bothy, the death of two Highland ghillies (employees of the estate who guide hunters and anglers) in a fatal fire is commemorated by a modest plaque. Set firmly into a large rock, the plaque is inscribed with the names of Finlay MacLennan and Tony Roberts. Also recorded is Smudge, Roberts' golden retriever.

The tragedy occurred on the evening of Friday 11 October 1985 when Roberts and MacLennan had completed a day's deer stalking with two Dutch guests of Letterewe Estate owner Paul Van Vlissingen.

Finding the dinghy that had brought them up Loch na Sealga capsized and the outboard motor submerged, the party transported the flooded engine up into the bothy, where Roberts and MacLennan attempted to dry it out. While they were doing this, it appears that the heat from a paraffin lamp caused petrol vapour to ignite. In the resulting fire the bothy, lined with pitch pine, was burned to the ground and the ghillies, who were trapped in the storeroom, perished in the flames. The Dutch guests, who had retired to the nearby lodge, were unable to rescue them. With the permission of the victims' families, Van Vlissingen erected the plaque in May 1986.

Climb steadily northwest to reach the summit ridge in 20 to 30 minutes. The ground falls away abruptly here, with buttresses, gullies and overhanging prows of rock dropping away for 300m into the corrie below. The pinnacled ridge of An Teallach stands framed beyond Loch na Sealga. You can turn right (east) here and follow the ridge out to the east summit (15 minutes return). From where you reach the ridge, a short, steep climb brings you to the summit of **Beinn Dearg Mhór** (910m). An Teallach dominates the view to the north; to the south are the spellbinding ridges, valleys and summits of the Great Wilderness.

Walk south from the summit for a couple of hundred metres and pick up an eroded path that zigzags northwest down the steep, stony slope towards the bealach (pass) between Beinn Dearg Mhór and Beinn Dearg Bheag. Below and to the right (north) the waters of Loch Toll an Lochain are your next goal, but don't be tempted to descend directly. It is easier to continue along the bealach almost to the beginning of the ascent to Beinn Dearg Beag and then follow grassy slopes northeast down to the lake shore.

Skirt the western shores of the loch and descend gently at first, and then more steeply, along the west bank of the burn that drains it. Cross over the burn where the descent begins to ease, and then cut across rough ground to pick up a good path on the shores of Loch na Sealga. Follow this path southeast until it reaches Gleann na Muice, where you should be able to ford the waters

without walking too far upstream. Cross the Srath na Sealga in front of Shenavall Bothy and then follow the path back out to Corrie Hallie.

THE GREAT WILDERNESS TRAVERSE

Duration	2 days
Distance	23 miles (37km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Corrie Hallie
Finish	Poolewe (opposite)
Nearest Town	Dundonnell (p214)
Transport	bus

Summary A scenic low-level route crossing the beautiful and isolated heart of a magnificently unspoiled fastness of rugged peaks, lonely glens and tranquil lochs.

The Great Wilderness is a particularly remote area of the western Highlands, stretching from Little Loch Broom in the north to Loch Maree in the south, and from the Fanichs in the east to the west-coast village of Poolewe. With an area of about 180 sq miles, it's rather small by many standards, but in Scotland (and Britain for that matter) this is wilderness indeed.

The landscape is mountainous, with some fine, austere peaks. Between the mountains there are lochs of all shapes and sizes, rivers, waterfalls, peat bogs and grassy valleys. The one thing that the landscape lacks is trees, so it may seem a bit strange when you see Fisherfield Forest, Letterewe Forest and

Dundonnell Forest on the map. Forest, as used here, means hunting ground, and the names indicate different estates.

The route itself follows well-trodden, though unmarked, paths for its entirety. It involves one ascent of 500m to a mountain plateau that is roughly half the height of the major peaks surrounding it. It is a long route but, for the second half, the terrain is largely flat and the going is quick. While it could conceivably fit into one long summer's day, it is well worth taking your time and spreading the route over two days, both for the sake of your legs and to fully appreciate the beauty and atmosphere of your surroundings. There are two shelters for walkers' use along the route: the bothy at Shenavall and a barn at Carnmore. Alternatively, you can camp anywhere along the route. The walk involves the crossing of two rivers that are impassable in spate, so avoid walking during or after heavy rain.

PLANNING**When to Walk/Stalking**

The route passes through the **Letterewe Estate** (☎ 01445 760311). Contact the estate for advice during its main stalking season, which is between mid-September and mid-November. The route also passes through the **Eilean Darach Estate** (☎ 01854 633203), where the traditional stalking season is mid-August to mid-October.

Maps

Use OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 435 *An Teallach & Slioch* or OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 19 *Gairloch & Ullapool*.

NEAREST TOWNS

See Dundonnell, (p214).

Poolewe

☎ 01445

A compact, picturesque village at the head of Loch Ewe, Poolewe has a modest array of facilities. **Slioch Outdoor Equipment** (☎ 781412; www.slioch.co.uk; Clifton; ☹ Mon-Fri), one of the quiet success stories on the Scottish outdoor scene, makes high-quality outdoor clothing; its shop stocks camping and walking equipment, maps and books.

The nearest ATM and TIC are in Gairloch, about 5 miles southwest along the A832.

SLEEPING & EATING**Poolewe Camping & Caravanning Club Site**

(☎ 781249; www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk; Inverewe Garden; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 £14/18) welcomes nonmembers and is close to the end of the walk.

Craigdhu B&B (☎ 781311; s/d £15/30) is a good old-fashioned B&B where you're welcome in the family home. Rooms are neatly furnished with a minimum of fuss. It's a short step along a lane in the centre of the village.

Poolewe Hotel (☎ 781241; www.poolewehotel.co.uk; s/d £42/80, bar meals £8-12; ☹ lunch & dinner), once a coaching inn, enjoys a great location, so most of the comfortable rooms have loch and sea views. Locally caught seafood is a speciality.

The **Bridge Cottage Cafe & Gallery** (breakfast £5, light meals £4-5; ☹ 10.30am-5pm) is licensed and does particularly good cakes and coffee.

There's just one **shop** (☹ Mon-Sat) with a fair range of supplies.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Westerbus (☎ 01445 712255) operates a service between Inverness and Gairloch via Poolewe (£8, 2½ hours, Monday, Wednesday and Saturday). **Scotbus** (☎ 01463 224410; www.scotbus.co.uk) runs the same route (£8, 2½ hours, daily).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

For transport details to Corrie Hallie see p215.

THE WALK**Day 1: Corrie Hallie to Shenavall**

2 hours, 4 miles (6.5km)

Follow the Day 1 description of the Beinn Dearg Mhór walk (above).

Day 2: Shenavall to Poolewe

8-9 hours, 19 miles (30.5km)

The first challenge is to cross the two rivers that snake towards Loch na Sealga. If they're in spate crossing will be impossible, but generally the water is calf- to knee-deep in the shallows and wading is cold but not difficult.

Leave Shenavall and cross Abhainn Srath na Sealga just southwest of the bothy. Stick to the river bank on the other side to avoid the worst of some very wet ground between the two rivers, then cross the bog to Abhainn Gleann na Muice. Follow this river's bank

where it leaves the plantation, take the west fork at a junction. This will bring you to the farm at Kernsary. At the boundary turn north beside the farm enclosures and make for a metal bridge across a stream. Walk north for about 150m, almost to a ruined cottage, to join the clear path leading across a heathery slope on the northern shore of Loch Kernsary. Halfway along the loch, on the southern shore, you can see a splendid example of a crannog (ancient island dwelling). At the end of the loch a short climb leads to a turnstile and Poolewe comes into view. Continue to the A832, turning left. The centre of Poolewe is just a couple of minutes' walk away.

SLIOCH

Duration	7½–8 hours
Distance	12 miles (19km)
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Incheril car park
Nearest Town	Kinlochewe (right)
Transport	bus
Summary	A beautiful approach along the shores of Loch Maree leads to a compact mountain horseshoe with excellent views.

The dramatic, double-tiered Slioch (980m/3214ft) rises majestically from the shore of Loch Maree. Eight hundred metres 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 dramatic. It is well named, the most likely meaning being 'spear'.

Unusually among mountain walks in most parts of the country, 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 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, which is between mid-September and mid-November.

Maps

Both OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 435 *An Teallach & Slioch* and the OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 19 *Gairloch & Ullapool* cover this route.

NEAREST TOWN Kinlochewe

☎ 01445

Kinlochewe is a dot on the map in a magnificent location. It sits right at the foot of steep, dramatic Glen Docherty and the head of Loch Maree, with views towards Slioch and the peaks of Beinn Eithe National Nature Reserve.

SLEEPING & EATING

Beinn Eithe Campsite (☎ 760254; free) is 1.5 miles north of the village along the A832, on the eastern side of the road; check the distance as there's no sign indicating where to turn off. Facilities are minimal but the setting is fantastic.

Cromasaig B&B (☎ 760234; www.cromasaig.com; A896; s/d £24/48, evening meal £16), just south of Kinlochewe, offers homely, simple accommodation. The owners are very knowledgeable about the local area.

Kinlochewe Hotel & Bunkhouse (☎ 760253; www.kinlochewehotel.co.uk; dm £10, s £33-35, d £66-70, mains £9-11; ☺ lunch & dinner) offers a warm welcome. The bunkhouse has a kitchen, or all meals are available 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; hope that the popular steak and real ale pie, and bean stew are on.

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

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

HEAVY INDUSTRY BESIDE LOCH MAREE

Anything remotely resembling industrial development around Loch Maree would be most welcome, 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, 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's not 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.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Westerbus (☎ 01445 712255) operates a service Inverness and Gairloch via Kinlochewe (£7, 1½ hours, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday). **Scotbus** (☎ 01463 224410; www.scotbus.co.uk) runs the same route (£6, 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

Map p224

From the cairn and plaque (about the Letterewe Estate) on the northern side of the car park, go up steps and through a gate. Turn left with the sign to '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 Chnàimhean. The well-worn path now climbs slightly and in less than 10 minutes leads into the first of several lovely mixed woodlands along the way. Soon you're down beside the river, where you catch sight of the mighty ramparts of Slioch for the first time. Just past the end of this first 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 unite a short distance beyond a stony burn. Further on, about 50 minutes from the start and a short distance beyond

another wooded area, you come to another fork. Bear left along a grassy path, generally close to the shore. Cross a pebble beach, pass through a silver birch grove and soon you come to the footbridge across thundering **Abhainn an Fhasaigh** (about an hour from the start).

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 river upstream. After 150m the path turns sharp 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 northeast, soon across generally flat ground. About 1.2km 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.

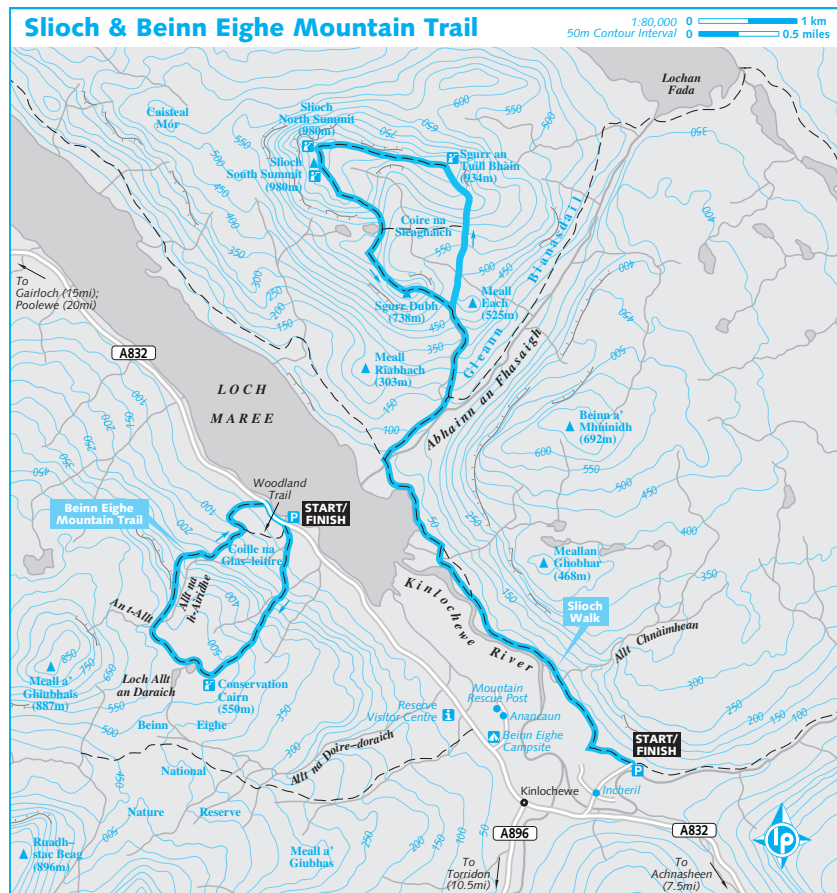
At the col between these two hills, the main path veers west around the bottom of Sgurr Dubh directly towards Slioch. Leave the path at the col and strike out over open ground across Coire na Sleghaich towards the grassy eastern slopes of Sgurr an Tuill Bhàin. Cross the stream that runs down the centre of the corrie and climb the heathery lower slopes of the mountain. Veer west to gain easier ground on a rocky shoulder and then climb to **Sgurr an Tuill Bhàin** (934m), where there is a wonderful view north over Lochan Fada to the remote heart of the Great Wilderness.

Pick up a path from the summit and follow it west, dropping 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 (980m), although the south summit enjoys official status as the higher one. Views from both points are stunning, with a panorama of Loch Maree stretching out to the Atlantic below you and the Western Isles visible on the horizon beyond. From the northern summit make a major change in direction turning south then swinging slightly east around the top of a steep drop to reach the trig point on Slioch's southern summit.

From the summit descend southeast on a grassy slope. The path becomes slightly confused through rocky ground; cross a

rise and then veer further east to drop down the left side of a steep rock spur and reach the col below, just east of two lochans. The main path heads east into Coire na Sleaghaich. If you want to complete the entire horseshoe, climb the rise to the south of the lochans, veering west slightly to locate 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 of the summit plateau and go down steeply towards Meall Each. Join back up with the main path at the bottom, turning south and retracing your route back to Loch Maree and the Incheril car park.



WESTER ROSS ROCKS

Many of the peaks of Wester Ross have exposed, rocky flanks and summits, and the geological processes that created the region can be clearly seen. Ancient Lewisian gneiss, up to 2500 million years old, is the bedrock. It was subsequently eroded and then, when the area was situated south of the equator around 800 million years ago, was smothered by desert sands up to 4 miles thick. This sedimentary material hardened to form a rock so specific to the area that it has been named red Torridonian sandstone, although in real life it looks more purple than red. Slioch, with its distinctive double-tiered silhouette, displays these rocks 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, sculpting wonderful pinnacle formations on high ridges. The pinnacles of An Teallach and the Horns of Beinn Alligin are superb examples of this process, and today the glue-like friction of the fine-grained sandstone provides a perfect rock playground for scramblers.

The third main geological component of the area, Cambrian quartzite, was formed by sediments laid down by tropical seas that flooded the sandstone around 600 million years ago. At the end of the last Ice Age, this rock was the first to emerge from beneath the ice. It was riven into pinnacles and the scree on Beinn Eighe, which makes it appear snow-covered, even in mid-summer.

BEINN EIGHE MOUNTAIN TRAIL

Duration	2½–3½ hours
Distance	2.5 miles (4km)
Difficulty	easy–moderate
Start/Finish	Glas Leitir car park
Nearest Town	Kinlochewe (p222)
Transport	private
Summary	A short, steep walk that explores the beautiful woodland and wild mountain terrain of the Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve.

Beinn Eighe (pronounced 'ben ay') National Nature Reserve was established in 1951, the first such reserve in Britain. It was created to help safeguard the largest remnant of ancient Caledonian pine woodland in the western Highlands, and covers 4750 hectares between the shore of Loch Maree and the mountain massif of Beinn Eighe (probably meaning 'file mountain', for its long, slender ridge). The whole reserve is managed by SNH. Two walking trails explore the best of the area's habitats. The Mountain Trail is longer and ventures higher up the slopes of Beinn Eighe for some great views; the Woodland Trail is only 1 mile long and explores the Caledonian woodland bordering Loch Maree. Both trails are well marked by stone cairns with 'indicator points', showing features of interest that are fully explained in the trail guidebooks, available from the visitor centre (see right). The trails are open during the short stalking

season, when signs will request walkers to keep strictly to the defined path.

The Mountain Trail leads up from the shores of Loch Maree, through Scots pine, to the bare and rocky mountain slopes above. It might be relatively short, and it might be waymarked, but don't underestimate the walk; the terrain is steep (one section gains 320m in height over a horizontal distance of 500m) and you need to use your hands to haul yourself up high rock steps in several places. The trail offers an ideal introduction to mountain walking, and is an informative and exciting place to bring older children. It's also a worthwhile alternative to the high peaks if they're cloud-covered.

PLANNING

Maps

The walk is covered by the OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 19 *Gairloch & Ullapool*. For more detail use the OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 433 *Torridon*.

Information Sources

Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve Visitor Centre (☎ 01445 760254; www.nnr-scotland.org.uk; A832; 🕒 10am–5pm Easter–Oct) is 1.2km north of Kinlochewe, housing displays about the reserves habitats and selling maps and natural-history guides. These include two of SNH's own publications. One is *Beinn Eighe: Britain's First National Nature Reserve*, a beautiful coffee-table volume with photos by Scotland's best-known outdoor

photographer, Colin Baxter, and others; the other, *Beinn Eighe: First Among Equals*, is more down-to-earth and provides a comprehensive introduction to the area.

The *Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve: Mountain Trail* guide is available from a vending machine at the Glas Leitir car park.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts and finishes at the Glas Leitir car park, about 2.5 miles north of Kinlochewe along the A832.

THE WALK

Map p224

From the information board at the Glas Leitir parking area, cross under the road on a walkway beside the river. Keep left at the trail junction just after the tunnel, following the direction of the mountain symbol on a marker post. The stony path follows along the banks of Allt na h-Airidhe for a short time then veers away to cross through a silver birch grove densely carpeted with bracken. The trail begins its ascent almost immediately, although the gradient is easy at first. As you climb, the bracken is interspersed by heather and the silver birch gives way to Scots pine.

The path joins up with a tumbling burn and climbs more steeply up its banks on stone steps, then crosses it on a wooden footbridge. The steps become more continuous as the trees dwindle in size and the path emerges onto open slopes. Views of Loch Maree and Slioch open up to the north. The rock steps gradually give way to natural slab and loose stone and the terrain becomes wilder. Just beyond the 305m marker cairn you'll need to use your hands to haul yourself up a couple of rock ledges as you climb a very steep section of the trail.

As you climb, views of the Beinn Eighe massif open up ahead and the steepest section of ascent is now over. The path weaves its way uphill between craggy outcrops of rock and finally reaches the **Conservation Cairn**. At 550m this is the high point of the trail and there is a real feeling of being in the heart of the mountains. The 360-degree panorama embraces the precipitous Torridon peaks, in a cluster to the southwest, and the lofty landscape of the Great Wilderness spread out to the north. In good visibility a total of 31 Munros (mountains

over 914m/3000ft) can be seen from this excellent vantage point.

The trail drops down to the west and weaves its way past several beautiful lochans. An t-Allt is crossed on stepping stones and the path turns north to follow the burn and begin the descent. The terrain is more gently graded than it was on the climb up. The burn soon disappears into a gorge to your right and, as you descend further, there are impressive views into the deep, sheer-sided chasm.

After a right bend and small rise the path leads to the rim of the gorge; take care here because the drop to the burn below is sheer. Continue on, back into the forest below. The path joins the Woodland Trail and turns left, soon reaching a wooden conservation cabin and a trig point. It leads on through silver birch woodland, across a boardwalk over marshy ground and back to the road. Cross the road and pass through trees to a beautiful pebble beach on the shore of Loch Maree. Turn right and walk along the top of the beach, crossing a wooden bridge, and back to the car park.

TORRIDON

The National Trust for Scotland's (NTS) 6450-hectare Torridon Estate embraces some of the most impressive peaks of Wester Ross: the massifs of Beinn Alligin and Liathach and parts of Beinn Dearg and Beinn Eighe, renowned for their deep corries, imposing buttresses, airy pinnacles and magnificent views. Parts of the eastern boundary of the NTS' estate, purchased in 1967, adjoin SNH's Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve.

Walks over Torridon's high ground are no mere strolls, and call for considerable fitness and mountain skills. Happily, there are also several low-level routes that explore the deep valleys between the mountain massifs. Whatever the route, given a little luck with the weather, Torridon is a magnificent area that will surely draw you back many a time.

PLANNING Maps

The OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 433 *Torridon* neatly covers all of the walks in this section, as does Harvey's 1:25,000 Super-

walker map *Torridon*. Most of the walks are covered by OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 24 *Raasay & Applecross*, although this map overlaps with OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 19 *Gairloch & Ullapool* on Beinn Alligin.

Books

Torridon, the Nature of the Place by Chris Lowe provides all you need to know about the area's flora, fauna and geology.

ACCESS TOWN

Torridon

☎ 01445

The village of Torridon, along Loch Torridon's northern shore, is the main settlement in the area. The nearest TIC and bank are 31 miles away in Gairloch, though the shop may be able to provide a cash-back service for small amounts from UK bank cards.

INFORMATION

The **NTS Countryside Centre** (☎ 791221; exhibition £3; ☎ 10am-5pm Easter-end Sep) is at the entrance of the village, just off the A896. 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 Torridon and Loch Torridon. Mountain weather forecasts are posted beside the entrance. Countryside rangers lead short walks between June and August aimed at introducing the natural and cultural landscape of Torridon, and high-level guided mountain walks are available by appointment; contact the centre for details.

SLEEPING & EATING

Torridon Campsite (free) is opposite the Countryside Centre. It's basic; 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 Damp Inn (☎ 791242; www.bendamp .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 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.

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

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Torridon village is at the eastern end of Loch Torridon, on the A896 between Kyle of Lochalsh and Kinlochewe. It is possible to arrive by public transport, if you're prepared to fit in with limited connecting services. The nearest train station is Strathcarron, reached with **First ScotRail** (☎ 08457 484950; www.firstscotrail.co.uk) from Inverness (£12, 1¼ hours, four services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and Kyle of Lochalsh (£5, 45 minutes, four services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday).

Donnie MacLennan (☎ 01520 755239) runs a bus service from Strathcarron station to Torridon via Lochcarron and Shieldaig. 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 12.35pm trains to Kyle and Inverness. The times and services can change, so contact Donnie beforehand.

BEINN ALLIGIN

Duration	6½-7 hours
Distance	6 miles (9.5km)
Difficulty	moderate-demanding
Start/Finish	Torridon House Bridge
Nearest Town	Torridon (left)
Transport	private

Summary An exciting circuit of a horseshoe ridge with two major summits that could challenge your head for heights and your scrambling techniques.

The circuit of ridges and peaks of Beinn Alligin is one of the most popular mountain walks in Wester Ross. A steep ascent allows access to excellent, airy walking, and the traverse of the Horns of Alligin offers a little slightly exposed scrambling. This route is a good warm-up for the difficulties encountered on An Teallach (p214) and Liathach (p229). If you find Beinn Alligin difficult then don't consider the other two; Liathach, in particular, is much more difficult. Most

of the scrambling on the horns can be bypassed, but even these alternatives are exposed so if vertigo is your problem, perhaps you should think twice about this one.

Beinn Alligin means ‘the mountain of jewels’. It is 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 trek for miles to reach the foot of the mountain. This route involves a total ascent of 1190m and follows clearly defined paths almost all the way. Take care to follow the directions on the main summit ridge and don’t be seduced by side paths that may lead to dead-end lookouts but also to potential difficulties.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts from the fairly large car park beside Torridon House Bridge, about 2 miles west of Torridon village on the road to Inveralligin.

THE WALK

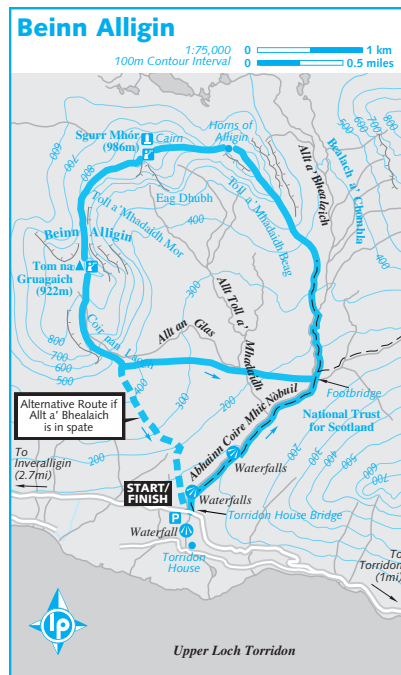
From the bridge (which affords a good view of the impressive waterfall and gorge on Abhainn Coire Mhìc Nòbuil), follow a path signposted to Coire Dubh, up through Scots pine woodland and out into open moorland. Straight ahead is the blunt western wall of Beinn Dearg, while to the right is the western end of Liathach and, to the left, Beinn Alligin itself. About 200m further along, go through a gate in a deer fence and continue for almost 950m to a footbridge. From here the path leads roughly north, towards the eastern end of the horseshoe ridge.

Climb along the crest of the broad and very steep ridge, using your hands to help negotiate some rocky steps, aiming for the three **Horns of Alligin**. You reach the base of the first horn 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), or follow the path on the left that skirts their south side. After the third horn, drop to a small col then climb again, swinging to the northwest to keep right of the steep drop down into the corrie. To your right (northeast) the view really begins to open out, revealing a beautifully jumbled mosaic of lochans, moors and smaller peaks, with Loch Maree beyond and the town of Gairloch visible on the coast.

It is a short distance to the summit of **Sgurr Mhór** (986m), three to four hours from the start. With the extra height the view is almost completely wraparound, with range upon range of wonderful peaks in every direction. Most notable are the Cuillin peaks on the Isle of Skye to the southwest, and the summits of Beinn Eighe to the east, the quartz scree mantle making them appear snowcapped.

From the summit head southwest down a grassy slope, keeping the corrie edge to your left. If visibility is poor, take real care on this section as the top of **Eag Dhubh**, the giant gash that dominates the view from below, is lurking in wait, to trap unwary walkers in mist. If the day is clear, the cliffs on either side of the gully frame the view of the glen far below, a classic among Scottish mountain vistas. *Don’t* try to descend this way.

Beyond Eag Dhubh go steeply up again, over large boulders, to reach the summit and trig point of **Tom na Gruagaich** (922m) and more good views (one to 1½ hours from the summit of Sgurr Mhór). Descend steeply south into Coir nan Laogh on a worn path beside several small, gurgling streams. 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’ Bhealach just above the footbridge. Cross it to reach the path followed on the way up and retrace your steps to the car park. Otherwise, head southeast to avoid crags on the broad spur and to find a stile over the long deer fence on the eastern fall of the spur. Follow rough paths back to the road opposite the car park. The descent from Tom na Gruagaich should take around two hours.

LIATHACH

Duration	7–8 hours
Distance	6 miles (9.5km)
Difficulty	demanding
Start/Finish	Allt an Doire Ghairbh parking area
Nearest Town	Torridon (p227)
Transport	private

Summary A sensational walk with lots of exposed scrambling on one of Scotland’s most challenging mountains. The views make this a truly memorable day.

Immediately to the north of Loch Torridon, a massive, 3-mile-long wall of rock pinnacles and buttresses sweeps up to an average height of more than 900m. The south face of this massif is littered with crags and boulder fields, and has no obvious line of weakness. The northern side is even more intimidating, with several brooding corries ringed by cliffs. This is Liathach (pronounced ‘lee agagh’) and the traverse of its ridge is one of the Scotland’s classic mountain challenges. Its name translates simply as ‘greyish one’.

The ascent is steep and unrelenting and the main ridge is exposed. The crux of the route is negotiating Am Fasarinen’s Pinnacles, which are reached after the ascent of Spidean a’ Choire Léith (1055m/3460ft), the main summit on the massif. The descent described is direct and convenient, but rather cruel to the knees and legs after a tough day. The kinder alternative is simply to follow the mostly grassy broad ridge west from Mullach an Rathain, down to the Inveralligin/Diabaig road. However, this is rather a long way from the start, so best suited to a party with two cars.

The traverse should be reserved for a dry summer day with good visibility and light winds. Wet ground can make the muddy paths and the rock treacherous.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts and finishes at a small informal parking area on the southern side of the A896 immediately west of Allt an Doire Ghairbh. This is about 2.5 miles east of Torridon village (on foot or by car) and 700m east of Glen Cottage. To walk to Torridon at the end of the day, turn right along the road instead of left; Torridon is just 1 mile along the road.

THE WALK

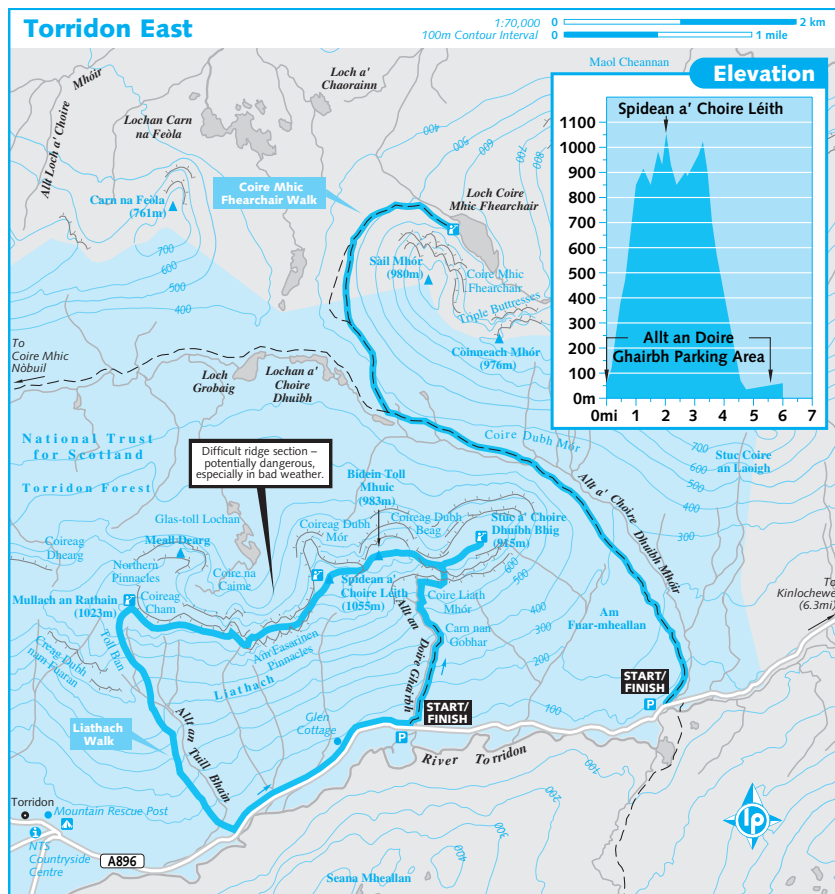
Map p230

Leave the road along a clear cairned path beside Allt an Doire Ghairbh. The path zigzags the steep slopes on the eastern side of the burn. The climb begins almost immediately and, though the path is well constructed, there are a couple of short scrambles over rock outcrops. An hour of steep ascent will bring you onto gentler slopes in Coire Liath Mhór, where the encircling buttresses, terraces, gullies and scree slopes seem to offer no easy access to the ridge above.

From this point the path is no longer constructed but continues distinctly as an eroded trail. The gradient soon increases again as you climb steadily north under the impressive eastern face of Spidean a’ Choire Léith. Swing abruptly to the east under a prominent gully and climb steeply along grass slopes for a short distance. Turn north and climb directly through rock outcrops (care is required in places) to reach the ridge at a bealach (pass) just west of Stùc a’ Choire Dhuibh Bhig, two to 2½ hours from the start. If the ascent to here proves difficult and worrying then do not continue beyond Spidean a’ Choire Léith, and follow the line of ascent to return to the start.

It is worth climbing east along the ridge as far as the cairned summit of **Stùc a’ Choire Dhuibh Bhig** (915m) for the superb view of Beinn Eighe’s sweeping ridges and scree. The view west to Spidean a’ Choire Léithe is a classic photo point on Liathach. Allow an hour for this detour.

From the bealach where you arrived at the crest, follow the ridge easily west to where it narrows just before the first of the two tops between here and Spidean a’



Coire Léith. Either scramble easily along the crest of this short, knife-edged section or traverse a path just beneath to the south. Climb easily across the two tops and descend steeply to a notch in the ridge where steep gullies meet at a sharp point. The easiest route down into the notch is along the crest of the ridge, but paths do run out to the right before contouring back left into the notch along a worrying and tremendously exposed ledge.

The climb from the notch to the summit of **Spidean a' Choire Léith** is quite straightforward, the last section crossing large slabs and blocks. The views are superb, encompassing all the summits of Torridon to the Great Wilderness beyond and culminating

in the jagged spine of An Teallach. To the south the rugged quartzite summits of the Coulin Forest (an ancient, hunting-related name) seem like foothills and, beyond them, the summits of Glen Affric and Mullardoch stretch across the horizon. On a very clear day you can even detect the whaleback of Ben Nevis on the horizon.

Back on Liathach, descend southwest from Spidean a' Choire Léithe, crossing awkward scree slopes to reach a grassy shoulder just before Am Fasarinen's Pinnacles. At this point a path begins to contour across the southern slopes just below the top of the ridge, while another stays on top to meet the first difficulties head on. The first path can be followed all the way

around the pinnacles and is certainly the easiest option, despite the exposure. Take great care as a simple slip could be fatal.

Meanwhile, the direct line of the ridge is entertaining without being unduly difficult as far as a notch at the halfway mark. The contouring path also passes this notch and if you wish to save a bit of time but still tackle the most difficult scrambling, take that path as far as here. There are two options for getting out of the notch and onto the easier ridge above, neither of them easy. There is either a passable, sloping stone gully around to the left or a route up the rock wall to the right. The scramble out of this notch is more akin to an 'easy' graded rock climb; don't tackle it unless you know what you're doing and are relaxed on steep and exposed rock.

Once past the pinnacles, a steady climb brings you to the summit of **Mullach an Rathain** (1023m), with more good perspectives over the other Torridon summits. Don't be tempted to scramble out onto the northern pinnacles as they are difficult and the rock is quite loose. The descent into the Toll Ban runs southwest down a stony ridge then turns southeast and follows an eroded path very steeply down scree slopes. The rest of the descent to the A896 follows this path and is remarkably easy considering the ruggedness of the surroundings. The road is reached 1½ to two hours from the summit of Mullach an Rathain. Turn left at the road and follow it for 1 mile to return to the start.

COIRE MHIC FHEARCHAIR

Duration	4½–4¾ hours
Distance	8 miles (13km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Coire Dubh parking area
Nearest Town	Torridon (p227)
Transport	private

Summary A beautiful, low-level walk to one of the most outstanding corries in Scotland, through impressive mountain glens and wild moorland with the chance of seeing red deer.

Hollowed out of the west end of the Beinn Eighe massif by the glaciers of the last Ice Age, Coire Mhic Fhearchair is one of Scotland's most impressive corries. This walk takes you through the wild heart of Torri-

don, with the brooding buttresses and pinnacles of Liathach's north face as company for most of the journey.

The walk follows paths constructed and maintained by the NTS, which owns and manages most of the country you'll pass through, except Coire Mhic Fhearchair itself. The total ascent for the route is 510m.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts and finishes at Coire Dubh parking area on the A896, 3.5 miles east of Torridon village. The parking area, popular on weekends, is on the northern side of the road, just before a bridge, and is marked by a signpost, 'Public Footpath to Coire Mhic Nòbuil'.

THE WALK

Map p230

Follow the well-constructed path away from the parking area and begin to climb steadily towards Coire Dubh Mór, the prominent cleft between Liathach and Beinn Eighe. The path stays well above Allt a' Choire Dhuibh Mhóir, thundering down through a small gorge to the right. About 40 minutes of steady climbing brings you to a flatter section right under the massive eastern prow of Liathach. In another few minutes cross Allt a' Choire Dhuibh Mhóir on good stepping stones. This may be difficult and potentially dangerous if the river is in full spate, in which case you'll need to follow the south bank of the river to ford it close to the junction with the path going up to Coire Mhic Fhearchair.

A gradual ascent, passing several small lochs, then brings you up through Coire Dubh Mór to a path junction marked with a small cairn. Already you have fine views of the northern corries and buttresses of Liathach, which stretch in an unbroken line of impregnability for almost 3 miles.

Turn right at the junction (the other path continues down into Coire Mhic Nòbuil) and begin climbing steadily around the western flank of Sàil Mhór. The path, though constructed, is quite strenuous in places but the views opening out across Coire Mhic Nòbuil and Beinn Dearg more than compensate for the effort. About 40 minutes from the stream crossing, the path swings around to the east and climbs steeply beneath impressive cliffs. A series of waterfalls drops down on the left and a

final steep climb brings you suddenly onto the boulder-strewn rock slabs on the shores of **Loch Coire Mhìc Fhearchair** (two to 2½ hours from the start).

From this point you can take in the view or explore further along the rough ground on either side of the lake. The alpine atmosphere of this place is quite special, with the imposing 300m-high Triple Buttresses at the very back of the corrie taking pride of place. Not long after WWII a Lancaster bomber crashed into the west buttress, killing the crew. Parts of the wreckage can still be seen in the far west gully. To the north and west there are excellent views across the wilderness of lochans and bog between Beinn Dearg, Baosbheinn and Beinn an Eoin. Retrace your steps to the parking area.

MORE WALKS

THE FANNICHS

The Fannichs is a compact mountain range several miles south of Ullapool with nine Munros (the highest being 1110m Sgurr Mòr), fine corries and high buttresses and an atmosphere of airiness and space. Of many possible routes, a 10.5-mile (17km) circuit takes in three summits and a fine mountain loch; allow seven to eight hours. An alternative is to stay low and walk in to Loch a' Mhadaidh and return on the stalkers' path, an easy-moderate scenic walk of three to four hours.

The walk is in the **Lochluichart Estate** (☎ 01997 414242), where stalking takes place from mid-August to 21 October.

Use OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 435.

The walk starts at a small, unmarked parking area on the A835, 12.5 miles southeast of Ullapool and 2.5 miles east of Braemore Junction. Approaching from that direction you will pass a conspicuous parking area on the right, east of the junction. About 1.2km further on, a track leaves the road on the left and there is room to park several cars.

THE GREAT WILDERNESS À Mhaighdean & Ruadh Stac Mòr

These two Great Wilderness peaks are probably the most remote in Britain; you'll need to walk at least 10 miles (16km) from

the nearest road to reach the foot of the mountains. À Mhaighdean (967m/3172ft) and Ruadh Stac Mòr (918m/3011ft) are two of the toughest on the Munro baggers' list. You can do them in a single day, but only with a predawn start, covering 27 miles in 14 hours. Ordinary mortals camp at Carnmore and carry a day-pack for the climb itself; start at Corrie Hall and follow the Great Wilderness Traverse (p218) to a jumping-off point. Either way, the northwest ridge of À Mhaighdean is superb. From the intervening col, there's an awful lot of scree on the way up to Ruadh Stac Mòr. Use OS Landranger map No 19; consult Cameron McNeish's *The Munro Almanac* for more detail.

TORRIDON Beinn Eighe

The Torridon giant Beinn Eighe is a sprawling mass of deep corries and scree-covered ridges, with no fewer than seven summits achieving Munro status. It is possible to reach all these in a single day, but a less demanding, though still strenuous and entirely worthwhile, alternative is to go for the highest and most impressive peaks, concentrated in the western half of the massif. Starting from the A896, halfway between Torridon and Kinlochewe (near Loch Bhar-ranch), follow a path to Coire na Laoigh and climb to the summit of Spidean Coire nan Clach (977m). Then follow a fine ridge west to reach the peaks encircling Coire Mhìc Fhearchair (p231). Descend into the corrie then follow the path out through Coire Dubh Mòr, reaching the road 1 mile or so west of the start. Total distance is around 12 miles (19.5km) and total ascent is 1300m; allow at least eight hours. Carry OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 433.

THE NORTHEAST Beinn Dearg

In the northeast corner of Wester Ross, the grey, scree-covered dome of Beinn Dearg (1081m/3556ft) towers above a sea of remote ridges and peaks. It's a popular summit, but in poor weather navigation on its featureless summit plateau can be tricky. You can start at a parking area on the A835 Inverness-Ullapool road at the southeastern end of Loch Droma. Allow seven to eight hours for the 11-mile (17.5km) route.

Use OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 20; once again, consult Cameron McNeish's *The Munro Almanac*.

THE SOUTH Maol Chean-dearg

The peaks of the Coulin Forest are largely overshadowed by the giants of Torridon, just to the north across Glen Torridon. However, the Coulin peaks offer a wilder walking experience, with fewer people. The highest Coulin summit, Maol Chean-

dearg (933m/3060ft), is easiest approached from the south. Begin at the A890 where it crosses the Fionn-abhainn River, just east of Lochcarron. This village has accommodation and a shop; Strathcarron station on the Inverness-Kyle of Lochalsh line is about 1 mile away. The route is 10 miles (16km), has a total ascent of over 900m and should take eight hours. Although the walk mostly follows good paths, navigation on the higher ground can be a real challenge. Use OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 25.

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