

Western Isles

The very name Western Isles (Eileanan Siar) expresses remoteness, difference and mystery, qualities that soon become real, almost tangible. There's always something special about travelling to islands and you soon realise these isles are strikingly different from each other; from the peatlands of north Lewis and the rocky mountains of Harris, to the mosaic of water and land in the Uists, and the compactness of Barra. However, they all share two qualities: an extraordinary sense of space in the vast sky and the limitless ocean, and a feeling of stretched time. Western Isles communities are lively and dynamic, but there is a relaxed feeling of unhurriedness. Waymarked walks with strong historical and natural-history themes are scattered throughout the isles, and there are enough hills, glens, rocky coasts and vast sandy beaches for months of exploration on foot.

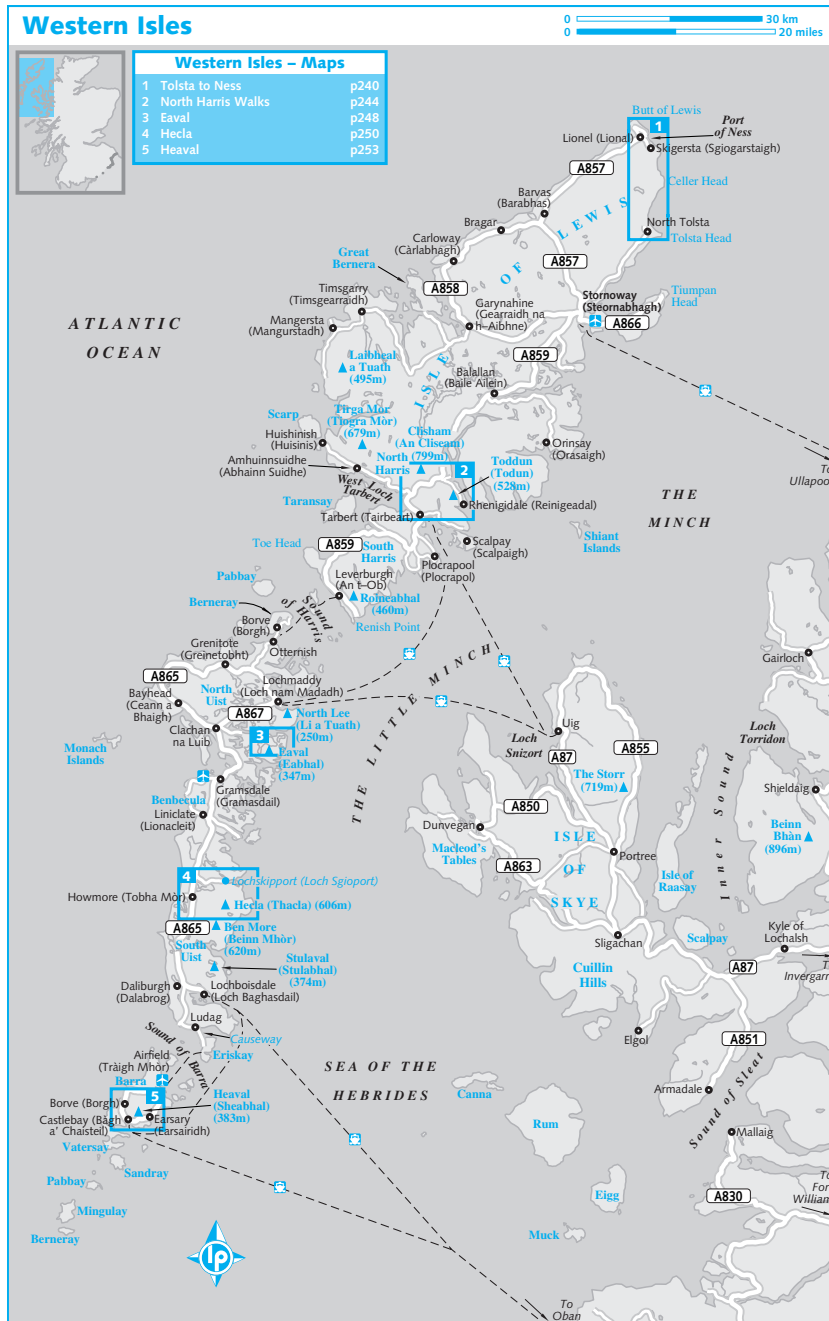
The Isle of Lewis can seem rather barren at first, but head for the coast to dispel this illusion – in the far northeast, and facing the wild Atlantic out west, you will find rugged cliffs, secluded coves and excellent walking. Harris, Lewis' southern neighbour, is the most mountainous of the isles, containing dozens of impressively rocky, steep-sided peaks, including Clisham (799m), the highest in the Western Isles. Continuing south, North Uist is mostly billiard-table flat but a few small, attractive hills poke their heads up skywards, notably Eaval, almost surrounded by water. A long chain of mountains dominates slender South Uist, among which Hecla is a formidable objective. Furthest south, Barra is a delight, with superb sandy beaches and a central knot of rolling hills affording great panoramic views.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discovering a fascinating variety of historical features on the **Tolsta to Ness** (p237) walk on Lewis' northeast coast
- Revelling in the wild, rugged mountainscapes of Harris from the summit of the Western Isles' highest peak, **Clisham** (p245)
- Gazing down at the extraordinary water-and-rock patchwork landscape from **Hecla** (p249) in South Uist
- Wandering along vast white-sand beaches on the isle of **Barra** (p251)

■ www.visitthebrides.com

■ www.thewesternisles.co.uk



ENVIRONMENT

Of the 50 or more islands of the Western Isles, often also called the Outer Hebrides, 12 are populated. They form a chain about 130 miles (209km) long on the western edge of the British Isles. Greyish Lewisian gneiss, the oldest rock type in northwestern Europe, is nearly ubiquitous, though large outcrops of pink and white granite are found in the mountains and on the coast of Harris. The last Ice Age honed the narrow mountain ridges, sculpted corries and U-shaped valleys in hilly areas, and left behind masses of glacial material in valleys and on flat ground. Particularly in northern Lewis, large areas are covered with peat – dark soil composed of dead vegetation and of great botanical importance.

Dramatic cliffs and deep inlets typify the east coasts. The long sandy beaches and machair (the flat, coastal plain, where a mixture of sand and peat produces fertile, flower-rich grasslands, home for numerous species of birds) on the Atlantic coasts originated after the last Ice Age when skeletons of innumerable marine creatures were pulverised into sand.

CLIMATE

One thing is certain about the Western Isles' climate – its variability from day to day, hour to hour and between areas within the isles. Relatively warm water from southern latitudes carried by the Gulf Stream is accompanied by mild, moisture-laden southwesterly winds that expend the greater part of their load on the western coast, leaving only showers for sheltered eastern parts. 'Mare's tail' clouds across the vast sky herald approaching processions of depressions from the southwest, followed by lower, hazy cloud and sheets of rain streaking the horizon. Interludes of dry, calm weather correspond with easterly breezes, bringing summer warmth.

The driest months are April through July; mountainous South Harris endures the highest rainfall anywhere in the Western Isles. July and August are the warmest months, though the maximum only occasionally struggles above 20°C. Gales, prevalent in December and January, are rare during summer. Even so, calm days are almost unknown and wind is the most important single factor likely to affect your plans in the Western Isles.

INFORMATION Maps & Books

For planning and familiarisation the OS Travel – Road 1:250,000 map No 3 *Western Scotland & the Western Isles* is good.

The Scottish Mountaineering Club's Hillwalkers' Guide *The Islands of Scotland* by DJ Fabian, GE Little and DN Williams includes the Western Isles. Though published several years ago, the basic facts remain unchanged. Among a handful of specialist walking guides, Mike Williams' *Western Isles*, describing 34 mostly shortish walks, stands out. For a guide to the isles' exceptionally rich archaeological heritage, Historic Scotland's *The Ancient Monuments of the Western Isles* by Noel Fojut et al is authoritative and comprehensive.

Information Sources

The official **Visit Hebrides** (www.visithebrides.com) website is useful for accommodation listings and reservations, transport links and general background information.

Public transport timetables, covering flights, ferries and buses to and within the isles, are available from local TICs or from the **Western Isles Council** (www.cne-siar.gov.uk).

Place Names

On street and roadside direction signs, Gaelic names either stand alone or are shown more prominently than the English name. Similarly, the OS Landranger 1:50,000 maps show Gaelic names almost exclusively, with English equivalents only for the major towns. In this chapter, the English place names are followed, wherever possible, by the Gaelic names.

Access

The walks described in this chapter follow defined and/or recognised routes. Elsewhere, as a general rule, you shouldn't strike any problems with access to the coast and hills. Nevertheless, if there's a house nearby, it's worth calling in and checking that there aren't any problems. The same applies to camping in the wild – ask first then leave your site as you find it (see p21). On Barra and Vatersay much of the countryside is fenced for grazing; it's best to seek out unfenced ground on the machair (coastal grasslands), where camping should be OK. Always take care with fences – find a gate or stile, or step over with minimal strain on the wires.

SUNDAY IN THE WESTERN ISLES

The Western Isles is the stronghold in Scotland of the Free Church, its origins lying in a mid-19th-century schism in the Church of Scotland. Later differences led to the establishment of several smaller churches, including the Free Presbyterian Church and the United Free Presbyterians.

Their congregations have built many remarkable churches on Lewis and Harris in particular, standing stolidly against the elements. The Bible is central to their beliefs, which require observance of the Lord's Day, Sunday, as a day of rest and devotion. Consequently, there are no bus services on Sunday, almost all shops and petrol stations are closed and only a handful of hotels provide meals for nonresidents. Some B&B proprietors prefer not to welcome or farewell guests on Sunday. You'll see signs prohibiting sport and even the use of children's playgrounds. However, Stornoway airport handles Sunday flights and the ferry company, CalMac, having desisted from Sunday sailings for decades, was both reviled and praised when it inaugurated services between Harris and Berneray and the Isle of Skye in 2006.

Things are different on South Uist and Barra, where most people adhere to the Roman Catholic faith.

In today's materialistic, sceptical world, these beliefs may seem anachronistic but their adherents in the Western Isles nonetheless deserve respect for their practices.

LEWIS

Lewis (Leodhas) is the most populous of the Western Isles, with Stornoway, the capital, on the east coast and several villages sprawled along the west side. North Lewis' empty hinterland is speckled with myriad lochs surrounded by almost featureless peaty moorland; the south is rockier and hillier. Everywhere the coast is exceptionally scenic, with cliffs punctuated by narrow inlets, bays and sandy beaches.

PLANNING Guided Walks

The **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** (RSPB; ☎ 07798 667751) puts on free guided walks on Lewis, usually lasting a couple of hours; details should be available from the Stornoway TIC (p238).

GETTING AROUND

If you're staying for only a few days, hiring a car may be more economical than bringing one on the ferry. Of the several hire companies in and around Stornoway, **Arnol Car Rental** (☎ 01851 710548; www.arnolmotors.com) delivers to the airport and ferry terminal. Small cars cost around £26 per day.

Buses link Stornoway to outlying areas, although you'll need to study the timetable carefully to ensure you aren't stranded late in the day; remember, buses *don't* run on Sunday.

TOLSTA TO NESS

Duration	4–4½ hours
Distance	10 miles (16km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Garry Beach
Finish	Skigersta
Nearest Towns	Stornoway (p238), Ness (p239)
Transport	private
Summary	Spectacular coastal scenery, remnants of summer shielings, superb views of Sutherland mountains and abundant sea birds.

This walk is inspired by the waymarked route from Garry Beach (Traigh Ghearadha), north of the village of New Tolsta (Bail' Ur Tholastaidh), north to the district of Ness (Nis) and the village of Skigersta (Sgiogarstaigh). The greater part of the waymarked route stays well inland from the cliff tops, crossing the peaty moorland. Thus it misses the very fine coastal scenery of cliffs, stacks, rock islets and deep inlets (geos) and the companionship of the sea birds – stiff-winged fulmars, skuas, gulls and cormorants. Seals can often be seen basking on the rocks at the foot of the cliffs.

The walk described here leaves the waymarked route early on and stays close to the cliffs, but take care as the cliffs drop vertically into the sea 50m or more below. Although there isn't a continuous path, on

the whole the going underfoot is across grassland with only a few boggy patches. At either end of the walk, the way is along minor vehicle tracks, used for access to peat diggings or for gathering sheep. The walk can be done in either direction – there's not much to differentiate.

Alternative An out-and-back walk from Garry Beach to Dibidale (Dhiobadail) would take in the best of the coastal scenery and the easiest going underfoot. The distance is 10 miles (16km), for which you should allow at least four hours.

HISTORY

During this walk you'll see evidence of strikingly different aspects of Lewis' history. Precariously situated on cliff tops are the remains of at least two Iron Age promontory forts, Dùn Othail and Dùn Filisclèitir (c 500 BC). Similarly located, atop a rock stack at the southern end of Garry Beach, is Caisteal a' Mhorair (Mormaer's Castle), probably dating from the 13th century.

Shieling settlements have been an integral part of island life; there are three along the route of this walk. Shielings (small stone cottages), some quite elaborate, some pretty basic, provided shelter while islanders were fishing or tending and gathering sheep.

Lord Leverhulme, a wealthy English magnate, bought Lewis and Harris in 1918 and launched ambitious plans to provide jobs for all, mainly by developing the fishing industry. One of his many projects was building a road from Tolsta to Port of Ness, but it only got as far as Abhainn na Cloich, barely 3 miles out. Two fine bridges survive as memorials to the scale of his vision. He ran into opposition from landless soldiers returning from WWI, for whom possession of land was more important than modern fishing ports. Then, finding himself in deep financial difficulties, Leverhulme offered Lewis to its people; apart from Stornoway, there were very few takers. He died in 1925.

PLANNING Maps

The OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 8 *Stornoway & North Lewis* covers the walk and shows the waymarked route. Alternatively, use OS Explorer 1:25,000 No 460 *North Lewis*.

NEAREST TOWNS Stornoway (Steornabhagh)

☎ 01851 / pop 6000

Far and away the largest town in the Western Isles, Stornoway is anything but a metropolis and feels very much like a country town. When making your plans, remember that some B&B hosts prefer not to welcome or farewell guests on Sunday and that shops are closed on Sunday (see the boxed text on p237); some may also be closed on part or all of Wednesday. The sole exception is the **Sandwich Rd filling station** (☎ 10am-4pm Sun).

Stornoway TIC (☎ 703088; info@visithebrides.com; 26 Cromwell St) stocks maps, books and public transport timetables and can make accommodation reservations.

Baltic Bookshop (☎ 702802; 8 Cromwell St) is particularly good for local references, and sells maps as well.

One of the very few places in the Western Isles where you can buy gas canisters for camping stoves is **Sportsworld** (☎ 705464; 1-3 Francis St).

SLEEPING & EATING

Laxdale Holiday Park (☎ 703234; www.laxdaleholidaypark.com; 6 Laxdale Lane; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 £8/10, dm £12), about 1.5 miles north of Stornoway, has plenty of camping space. The compact bunkhouse has four-person rooms and a kitchen, and there's a barbecue area.

Stornoway Backpackers (☎ 703628; www.stornoway-hostel.co.uk; 47 Keith St; dm £10) is only five minutes' walk from the ferry, in a traditional cottage. The rooms certainly aren't cramped and a light breakfast is thrown in.

Dunroamin B&B (☎ 704578; www.dunroaminbandb.co.uk; 18 Plantation Rd; s/d £25/56, dinner £15) is centrally located, and serves a particularly good breakfast.

An Leabharlann Coffee Shop (☎ 708631; 19 Cromwell St; mains to £3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; ☎), an extension of the public library, serves a wide variety of snacks and offers excellent value for money.

Thai Cafe (☎ 701811; 27 Church St; mains £6-8; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) is a real find on the far side of the Minch, with genuine, quality Thai cuisine; bring your own drinks.

Stornoway Balti House (☎ 706116; 24 South Beach; mains £7-12; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a Stornoway institution. Its extensive menu has something for everyone with a taste for curries and the like.

SHORT WALK

The gently undulating coastal fringe of west Lewis spills over into an intricately indented coastline, cluttered with stacks, precipitous clefts, small coves and beaches. The waymarked **West Side Coastal Walk** from Bragar to Garenin explores the most impressive stretch, the best of which lies between the villages of Dalbeg (Dialbeag) and Garenin (Gearrannan), a 4-mile (6.3km) walk; allow two hours. Use either OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 8 or OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 460. There are car parks at the end of the Dalbeg road (off the A858) and about 1.5 miles northwest of Carloway (on the A858) near the entrance to **Na Gearrannan Blackhouse Village** (☎ 01851 643416; www.gearrannan.com; ☎ May-Sep). Lived in until the early 1970s, this village has been faithfully restored and is well worth a visit, as is the **Blackhouse Café and Restaurant** (☎ 07921 854470; breakfast £3, lunch £5, dinner mains £11-13; ☎ café 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, restaurant dinner Thu-Sat). Here too is the **Garenin Hebridean Hostel** (www.syha.org.uk; dm £8), in one of the restored cottages.

From the Dalbeg car park walk up the road to a sharp left bend; cross a footbridge below to the right and begin to follow green waymarker posts, generally along a fence on the seaward side, well inland. The route crosses undulating countryside and descends to Dalmore (where there are toilets). Go up steps beside the more recent of the two cemeteries. Soon, excellent views north open up. Cross a wide, shallow glen, pass a rocky cove and climb, mostly close to the coast, on firm dry ground. Then come more undulations and the route passes the deep inlet of Fibhig, its cliffs busy with sea birds. With fine views in abundance, continue generally west and southwest, then south. Descend across a shallow glen, go up to a crest then down to Garenin village.

For self-caterers there's a Somerfield supermarket opposite the exit from the ferry terminal, and two Co-op supermarkets, one opposite the TIC and the other at the northern end of town.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Fares on the following routes vary widely between seasons and days of the week.

British Airways/Loganair (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.britishairways.com) operates flights from Glasgow (one hour, four flights Monday to Saturday) and Inverness (40 minutes, four flights Monday to Saturday).

British Midland (☎ 08706 070555; www.flybmi.com) flies daily from Edinburgh (1¼ hours).

Eastern Airways (☎ 08703 669100; www.easternairways.com) links Aberdeen and Stornoway (one hour, daily Monday to Friday). **Highland Airways** (☎ 0845 450 2245; www.highlandairways.co.uk) operates between Inverness and Stornoway (40 minutes, three flights Monday to Saturday).

Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac; ☎ 08705 650000; www.calmac.co.uk) operates a ferry service between Ullapool and Stornoway (passenger/vehicle £12/56, 2¼ hours, at least two daily Monday to Saturday). Island Hopscoth fares will save you considerable sums of money if you're making more than one crossing.

Scottish Citylink (☎ 0870 550 5050; www.citylink.co.uk) bus services from Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness connect with the ferries at Ullapool.

Ness (Nis)

☎ 01851

Ness is a district rather than a particular village. Its several villages, with few facilities, are scattered along the northernmost miles of the A857.

SLEEPING & EATING

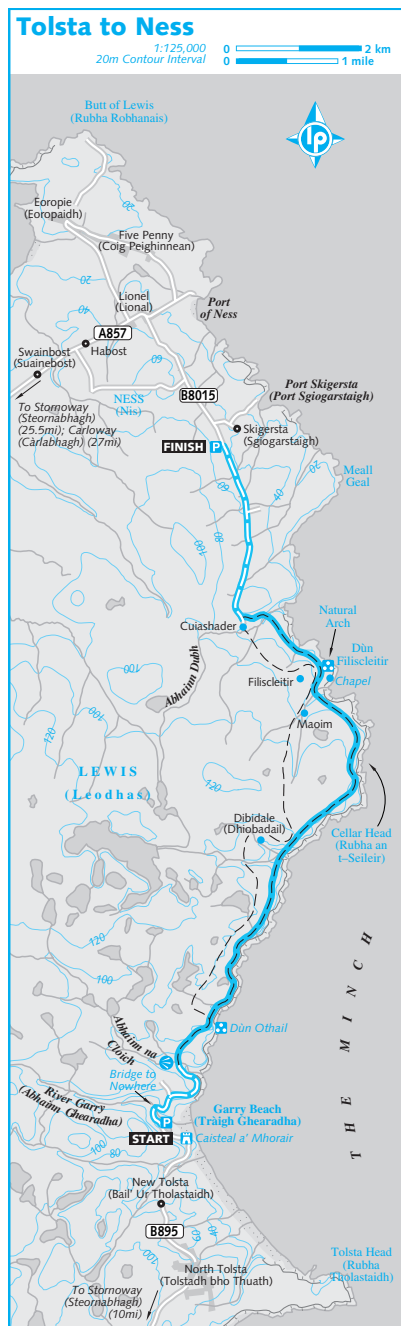
Galson Farm Guest House (☎ 850492; www.galsonfarm.freeserve.co.uk; South Galson; dm/s/d £9/45/80, evening meal £20) is a beautifully restored property a short distance from the A857, 6 miles (10km) southwest of Lionel. Rooms in the guesthouse are large and luxurious; the small bunkhouse has a kitchen.

The **Cross Inn** (☎ 810152; Port of Ness; bar meal mains to £10) is the nearest pub for refreshments after the walk.

The nearest shop to the end of the walk is a licensed grocer at Swainbost (Suainebost), about 1.5 miles southwest along the A857 from its junction at Lionel (Lional) with the B8015 Skigersta road.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Galson Motors (☎ 840269) runs bus service W1 between Stornoway and Port of Ness (£3,



one hour, at least four services Monday to Saturday).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar; ☎ 709747) operates bus service W5 from Stornoway to the village of New Tolsta (£2, 50 minutes, Monday to Saturday). To reach the start of the walk from New Tolsta, simply walk north out of the village along the main (and only) road; it descends quite steeply to sea level and parallels the coast to the car park above Garry Beach, 800m from the village.

By car, follow the A857 north from Stornoway for just over 1 mile to Newmarket. Turn right along the B895 and follow it to the car park above Garry Beach, about 800m beyond New Tolsta.

From the car park at the end of the walk near Skigersta it is 2 miles along the B8015 to the junction with the A857 at Lionel. **Galson Motors** (☎ 840269) buses on service W1 stop at Lionel en route to Stornoway (£3, one hour, every two hours weekday afternoons, one service Saturday afternoon).

THE WALK

From the car park at Garry Beach set out along the rough, sealed road as it dips down to cross the incongruous Bridge to Nowhere across River Garry (Abhainn Ghearadha). Past the river, the road becomes more of a vehicle track heading to the coast. From here, on a clear day, some of the Sutherland peaks can be seen across the Minch. Beyond the concrete bridge across Abhainn na Cloich (where the waterfall is best seen slightly downstream), the route is marked by green posts with a yellow band. After about 50m the driest ground should be upslope from the marked route, leading northeast across moorland. Aim for a post on a heathery knoll and pick up the path on the seaward side of the knoll. A little further on, past **Dùn Othail**, a prehistoric fork on a rocky promontory, the waymarked route swings away from the coast to cross the moor. Instead, stick to the much more scenic coast where more-or-less-continuous paths, made by sheep and walkers, follow the cliff tops. The panorama of mountains across the eastern skyline changes constantly as you move north.

After nearly 2 miles of fine walking above the crinkled coastal cliffs, you come to the

ruins of a stone cottage on a grassy knoll (about 1¼ hours from the start). The knoll overlooks the steep-sided glen of **Dibidale**, the site of a shieling village. Drop down to cross the burn at a confluence, following waymarker posts, and climb steeply up the other side to a cluster of ruined shielings. The marked route continues its inland course. If you're pursuing the independent coastal way, you'll find that the path of sorts is much less obvious from here, across grassland and above the many spectacular geos in the cliff line.

Turn inland to cross the next sizable stream below the place shown as Maoin on the OS map. Here you might find, and wonder about, the remains of a cluster of curious stone structures built into the steep slope near the burn. Up the other side you come to the remains of a tiny chapel, built in the 1920s for the residents of the surrounding village of **Filiscleitir** (about two hours from Dibidale). Dùn Filiscleitir occupies an improbable site at the cliff edge, overlooking a spectacular **natural arch**. Here you can rejoin the marked route, following a vehicle track that leads inland, or stay with the coast to Abhainn Dubh then heading west to reach the vehicle track at the former shieling village of **Cuishader**. From here it's about an hour's walk to the parking area at the end of the sealed road near the village of Skigersta.

HARRIS

Harris (Na Hearadh) adjoins Lewis, occupying the southern third of their island. Its name probably comes from an old Norse word that means 'the higher parts'. The Lewis/Harris boundary runs through Loch Seaforth, across Loch Langavat's southern end and west along the northern shores of Loch Resort.

Rock is the overwhelming feature of the landscape – there's plenty of water too, in freshwater and sea lochs, but it's the surreal, glaciated moonscapes that distinguish Harris from the rest of the isles. The north of Harris is wilder and more mountainous, with Clisham (799m) being the highest peak in the Western Isles, and several other 700m-plus mountains towering over long, deep glens and remote lochs. South Harris has plenty of respectable, though

lower, mountains and is renowned for the magnificence of its west-coast beaches and machair.

This section describes two walks in north Harris, one following a historic path to an isolated settlement, with high- and low-level options, and the other to Clisham. There are more suggestions in the boxed texts on p246 and on p254.

PLANNING Guided Walks

The **RSPB** (☎ 07798 667751) runs free guided walks on Harris, usually lasting a couple of hours; details should be available from the Tarbert TIC (p242).

RHENIGIDALE PATH

Duration	4–4¼ hours
Distance	7 miles (11km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Lacasdale Lochs bridge
Nearest Towns	Tarbert (p242), Rhenigidale (p243)
Transport	bus

Summary Follow a historic path through magnificent mountain and coast scenery to the isolated hamlet of Rhenigidale, with the chance to explore a deserted village or climb the rugged peak of Toddun.

Until 1990 Rhenigidale village (Reinigeadal) could only be reached on foot along rough paths, which were hazardous in winter, or by boat. The new road over the mountains made life much easier for the residents, but perhaps took away some of the magic of the place for visitors. Most of the old path survives and provides an outstandingly scenic walk up and over a rugged ridge and steeply down to the shores of Loch Trolamaraig. The path is easy enough to follow, although boggy and rocky in places; around 400m of ascent is involved.

Rhenigidale sits on the northern shore of Loch Trolamaraig and close to the entrance to Loch Seaforth, which bites deep into the interior of Harris. In the sheltered northwestern corner of Loch Trolamaraig is a luxuriant botanical oasis (by Harris standards) with willow, aspen and fragile primroses, protected from the wind and nourished by a rushing stream.

HERBERT GATLIFF – VISIONARY

Herbert Gatliff, an Englishman born near the end of the 19th century, dedicated most of his life to young people and the youth-hostel movement. He discovered the Western Isles in the late 1940s and was completely captivated; annual visits followed for the next 20 years. Convinced that the isles were the ideal place to establish simple hostels, he tried unsuccessfully to persuade the SYHA to extend its empire.

Undaunted, Gatliff seized an opportunity to open a hostel at Rhenigidale. An empty thatched cottage was soon made ready and opened in Easter 1962, when access was only on foot or by boat. Howmore Hostel, also a thatched cottage, followed in 1964. The next year, a hostel was opened on the island of Scarp (off Harris' west coast) but it closed in 1969 when the islanders moved across to Harris.

Herbert Gatliff died in 1977 but his work is carried on by the Gatliff Trust, in partnership with the local crofters who own the hostel buildings. In 1987 the SYHA adopted the hostels, the main benefit being publicity. Running of the hostels stayed with the crofters and the **Gatliff Hebridean Hostels Trust** (www.gatliff.org.uk; 30 Francis St, Stornoway).

The four Hebridean hostels – Garenin, Rhenigidale, Berneray and Howmore – provide no-frills accommodation with basic facilities, including heating (although not central heating), and an indefinable atmosphere of camaraderie and freedom.

Alternatives Using Rhenigidale as a base, there's scope for at least two walks in the vicinity. This first is to Toddun (Todun; 528m), wedge-shaped and precipitous, but a surprisingly approachable peak. Standing apart from the main north Harris mountains, Toddun affords spectacular all-round views (see p244).

You can make it a full day by descending west from Toddun, about 150m north of the summit. From the glen below, continue over An Reithe, from where a broad gully, cutting diagonally across its western face, leads down to the southern end of Loch an Reithe. Then it's over Stralaval (Strathahal; 389m) and down to the path in lonely Glen Lacasdale, which provides an easy stroll down to the Tarbert–Scalpay road, about 800m west of the start of the path to Rhenigidale. This option takes six hours to cover the 11 miles (18km) and involves 1010m of ascent.

Another possibility is to visit the deserted settlement of Molinginish (Molingeanais), perched above Loch Trolamaraig opposite Rhenigidale (see p244). This walk could be incorporated in the return to Lacasdale Lochs, in which case the overall distance is 8.5 miles (13.5km).

HISTORY

Rhenigidale originated in the 1820s as a new home for crofters evicted from the Forest of Harris (estate), the area along the Huishinish

(Huisinis) road (B887) west of Tarbert. Early in the 20th century around 90 people lived in Rhenigidale, occupying 17 houses, most of which are still standing. They were expert boat handlers as all their supplies, including peat (for fuel) and seaweed (for fertiliser), had to be shipped in from Tarbert.

Molinginish was settled around the same time as Rhenigidale; at least 12 families lived there, enough to support a school. The village was abandoned in 1965.

**PLANNING
Maps**

Consult either OS Explorer 1:25,000 No 456 *North Harris* or OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 14 *Tarbert & Loch Seaforth*.

**NEAREST TOWNS
Tarbert (Tairbeart)**

☎ 01859 / pop 480

The main town on Harris, Tarbert straddles a narrow neck of land between north and south Harris, with the Atlantic Ocean to the west and the Minch to the east. Leverburgh, a small village on the south coast, has an interesting history connected with Lord Leverhulme (p238), and is another accommodation possibility.

Tarbert's **TIC** (☎ 502011; tarbert@visithebrides.com; Pier Rd), near the ferry terminal, opens for late-arriving ferries. It stocks maps and a small range of books and can help with accommodation reservations. A useful re-

source for Leverburgh is the local website, www.leverburgh.co.uk.

Harris Tweed Shop (☎ 502493; Main St) carries books on Harris and the other Western Isles. *Harris in History & Legend* by Bill Lawson, the well-known local expert, provides an excellent introduction to the area.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are no formal camping grounds on Harris; the nearest is in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis.

AmBothanBunkhouse (☎ 520251; www.ambbothan.com; Ferry Rd, Leverburgh; dm £14), 20 miles south-west of the town, is easily the best hostel on Harris, especially if you're heading for the Berneray ferry. Facilities are excellent.

Avalon Guest House (☎ 502334; www.avalonguesthouse.org; 12 West Side; s/d £28/50, evening meal £15) has a fine outlook over inner Loch Tarbert. Though small, rooms are well equipped.

Ceol na Mara (☎ 502464; www.ceolnamara.com; 7 Direcleit; s/d £35/60, dinner £20) is a few miles south of Tarbert, in a superb location, and comes highly recommended as setting the standard for all B&Bs.

Firstfruits (☎ 502439; Pier Rd; lunch mains £4-7, dinner mains £7; ☎ lunch Mon-Sat, dinner Tue-Fri), opposite the TIC, is an excellent cottage tearoom and restaurant. You need to book for dinner – the menu changes daily and always includes a vegetarian dish. Bring your own drinks; corkage is not charged.

Clisham Keel Restaurant (☎ 502364; Pier Rd; mains £8-17; ☎ lunch & dinner), in the Macleod Motel opposite the ferry terminal, has standard fare, with seafood and steak specialities. Vegetarian dishes rise above the ordinary and bottled Hebridean ales are available.

Munro's off-licence grocery has a butcher section.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

CalMac (☎ 08706 650000; www.calmac.co.uk) runs daily ferries between Uig on the Isle of Skye and Tarbert (passenger/car £9/39, 1¼ hours). Coming from North Uist, you'll sail on the CalMac ferry via a fascinating route across the islet-studded Sound of Harris from Berneray to Leverburgh (passenger/car £6/25, one hour, up to four daily).

Hebridean Transport (☎ 01851 705050) bus service W10 links Stornoway with Tarbert (£3, one hour, four services Monday to Saturday) and Leverburgh.

Tarbert is 37 miles (59km) from Stornoway along the A859, almost all of which is a good two-lane road.

Rhenigidale (Reinigeadal)

The only place to stay in Rhenigidale is the **Rhenigidale Hostel** (www.syha.org.uk; dm £8), simple accommodation with a special tranquillity. You need to come self-contained with a sleeping bag and supplies; there isn't a shop in the village. As a Gatliff Hebridean hostel (see the boxed text, opposite), bookings are not accepted – first come, first served. The nearest telephone is at the Maaruig (Màraig) junction, less than 1 mile down the Rhenigidale road from the A859 and 2.5 miles from Rhenigidale.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Rhenigidale is at the end (about 3 miles) of a minor road, which branches from the A859 between Ardvourlie (Aird a' Mhuilaidh) and the B887 junction.

Harris Car Services (☎ 01859 502221) operates a minibus service between Rhenigidale and Tarbert Pier (£2, 30 minutes, two services Monday to Saturday). Seats are limited and must be booked the night before for the morning run, or by 3pm latest for the late-afternoon service.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts and finishes at a car park (signposted 'To Youth Hostel') on the Tarbert–Scalpay (Scalpaigh) road, just across the bridge over the stream flowing out of Lacasdale Lochs, 2 miles from Tarbert.

Scalpay Community Minibus (☎ 01859 540356) does the run between Tarbert and Scalpay, passing the start of the walk (£1, five minutes, four services Monday to Saturday).

THE WALK

Map p244

From the car park the track starts to climb almost straightaway, near the tumbling Abhainn an t-Sratha. After about 40 minutes you reach a fairly broad saddle (where there's a large cairn) on the long ridge between Beinn a' Chaolais to the south and Trolamul to the north. Within five minutes, you pass a neat cairn on the right, marking the start of the path to Molinginish (see the Side Trip on p244). The Rhenigidale path soon copes with the extremely steep drop to the shore of **Loch Trolamaraig** in a series of

extraordinary zigzags, through broken cliffs lower down, to a bridge across Abhainn Cheann a' Locha, the stream in rugged Glen Trolamaraig, with a shingle beach nearby (25 minutes from the saddle).

The path rises sharply from the bridge but soon heads down across the spur to a gated stream crossing. Continue up, soon past the silent remains of the village of **Garry-aloteger** (Gearraidh Lotaigear), with substantial stone cottages and stone-walled enclosures. The low, parallel ridges in the nearby fields were 'lazy beds' – humps laboriously created by hauling loads of seaweed to enrich the poor soil for the cultivation of potatoes and animal fodder. From here it's a short distance along the narrow, grassed path cut into the slope, up to the road. **Rhenigidale** is barely 800m down the road (about 50 minutes from the shingle beach). Return to Lacasdale Lochs bridge by the same route.

SIDE TRIP: TODDUN

3 hours, 4 miles (6.5km), 550m ascent

From the road west of Rhenigidale, follow the path signposted to Urgha and Tarbert

(the path followed on the main walk), through the remains of Garry-aloteger, across a bridge and leave the path 10m further on. Walk north up the broad spur to a fence; bear left and follow it generally west until you meet a fence running north-south. Cross this fence then climb to the well-defined ridge and follow it generally northwest, shortly crossing another fence. Keep to the highest ground – it's surprisingly easy to find a way up through the scattered crags to the summit ridge. Go on to the survey cairn sheltered by a circular stone wall on the summit of **Toddun** (an hour from the main path). Among many other places, you can gaze upon the mountainous massif to the north, dominated by Clisham; the Shiant Islands to the east; and the South Uist 'hills' to the south. Retrace your steps to Rhenigidale.

SIDE TRIP: MOLINGINISH

3 hours, 5 miles (8km), 150m ascent

Follow the approach path from the road west of Rhenigidale, to go down past Garry-aloteger and on to the bridge over Abhainn

Cheann a' Locha. The Molinginish path takes off a short distance up from the shingle beach and soon becomes clear as it cuts across the precipitous slope; it's narrow, rocky and boggy in places. The second stream crossing needs *great care*, making use of slender rocky ledges. After about 35 minutes the path starts to descend and suddenly the ruined and roofed cottages of Molinginish materialise, crammed into a small, partly sheltered glen right down to the edge of the shingle beach, with the lazy beds above.

For the walk through to Lacasdale Lochs (or to make a round walk back to Rhenigidale), cross the burn and pick up the track through a large gap in the fence across the slope. The track is wide and still in good condition, with few bogs to negotiate as it rises west across the moorland. Allow about 30 minutes up to the saddle and the cairned junction with the main Rhenigidale path.

CLISHAM

Duration	3½–4 hours
Distance	4 miles (6.5km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Maaruig River bridge
Nearest Town	Tarbert (p242)
Transport	bus

Summary The Western Isles' highest peak – a steep, rocky, straightforward ascent for superb all-round views of peaks, lochs and deep glens.

Clisham (An Cliseam; 799m/2622ft) is well worth climbing for the exceptional views on the clear, not-too-windy days that do happen from time to time on Harris. The meaning and derivation of its name is uncertain, but an educated opinion has it being of Norse origin and possibly meaning 'rocky cliff'.

The peak dominates a complex array of narrow, granitic ridges and peaks rising steeply from the western shore of Loch Seafort and overlooking West Loch Tarbert to the southwest. To the west, Clisham's massif is separated from another magnificently rugged group of peaks by a long, deep, north-south glen.

The conventional approach up the southeastern ridge from the A859 is straightfor-

ward, although almost unrelentingly steep; the total ascent is 640m. There is a clear enough path over some of the lower, boggy ground and high on the main ridge. If the ground is seriously wet, a recommended variation is the spur of the southern side of Maaruig River, a steep climb to a point west of the rocky bluff of Sròn Carsactlett. Then head northwest and west to gain the steep slopes of Clisham itself.

Alternative Experienced and agile walkers can take a different approach, from Bunavoneader (Bun Abhainn Eadara) on the Huishinish road, via Mò Buidhe, Mullafodheas (743m) and the scrambling ridge east to Clisham, returning via Tarsaval.

PLANNING

Maps

Use either OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 456 *North Harris* or OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 14 *Tarbert & Loch Seafort*.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

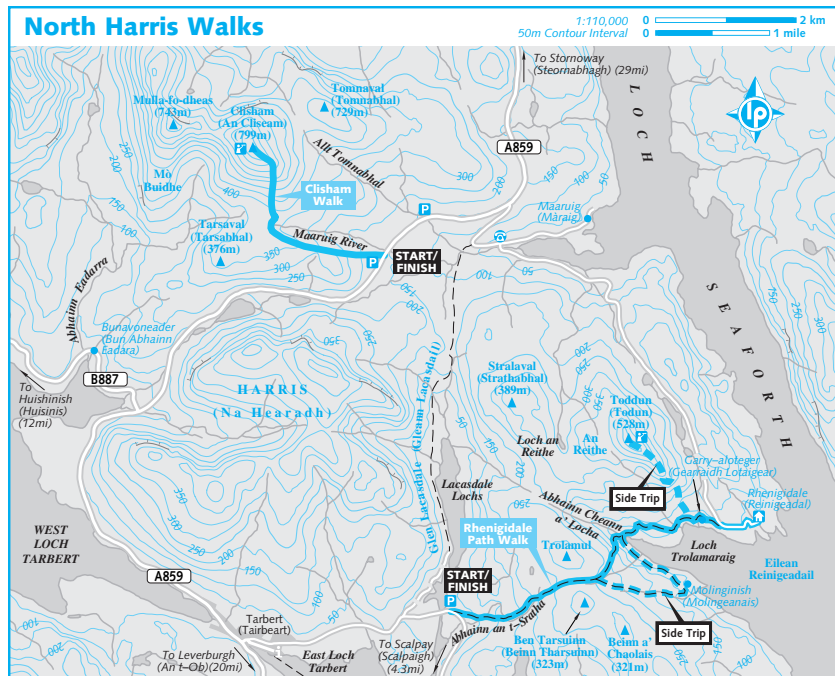
The walk starts at a parking area on the northern side of the A859 at the Maaruig River bridge, about 1 mile west of the turn-off to Rhenigidale. The **Hebridean Transport** (☎ 01851 705050) bus on the Stornoway–Tarbert–Leverburgh service (see p243) stops at the Rhenigidale turn-off.

THE WALK

Map p244

From the car park a slightly muddy path leads generally northwest, tending west, above the Maaruig River. The path isn't always easy to follow but it's not difficult to make your way up to the broad saddle at the foot of Clisham's steep southern slopes. From here, make good use of grassy leads northwards among the boulders and scree to gain the skyline ridge, gradually changing direction to climb northwest.

Once the ridge narrows and becomes distinct, a clear path materialises and leads along the slender rocky spine to the compact summit of **Clisham**; the survey (trig) cairn is surrounded by a sheltering stone wall (about 1½ hours from the start). On a good day there isn't much of the Western Isles you can't see from here, and the view extends east to the more prominent peaks in Wester Ross and Sutherland. Return to the start by the same route – more or less!



SHORT WALK

The peninsula at the southwestern extremity of north Harris, sheltering **Hushinish** (Huisinis), offers scenic, low-level walking along the rugged coast, with fine views of the uninhabited island of Scarp. A 5-mile (8km) walk following an old track to secluded beaches can painlessly last all day in good weather. Access is via the B887 from the A859 (2.5 miles north of Tarbert); it ends at a car park (with toilets) 14 miles (22.5km) west. A **Western Isles Council** (☎ 01859 502213) bus runs between Hushinish and Tarbert (£2, 45 minutes, three services Monday to Friday during school terms, two services Tuesday and Friday during school holidays). Use OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 13.

Begin by following a sandy vehicle track north to the coast; go through a gate to the east at the seaward end of a fence and the old track soon becomes clear. It crosses the steep, rugged hillside, close to a sheer drop to the sea in places, then traverses a potentially marshy saddle. From here it virtually disappears. Descend to the shore of Loch na Cleavag and go on past a white cottage, across drier ground to Loch Cravadale; the sandy beach at the head of the loch is a few minutes south. To continue, cross Loch na Cleavag's outlet then follow its northern shore west. From the northwest corner, near a tiny beach, head northwest across the short grassy sward to the beautiful creamy white sands of Tràigh Mheilein. Walk southwest then turn inland near a knot of sheep pens. Make your way across country, over the crusty hill (Gresclett) from where it's a short descent to the saddle where you rejoin the outward route to return to Hushinish.

NORTH UIST

At first North Uist (Uibhist a Tuath) seems to comprise just water separated by scraps of rock and soil. But there is actually lots of dry ground (mainly in the northwestern quarter), some small but attractive mountains, miles of magnificent beaches on the north coast and a rugged eastern coastline. Beyond the principal town of Lochmaddy (Loch nam Madadh), which takes its name from the extraordinary, island-studded sea loch, there are a few villages on the western side and many houses and crofts scattered in between. North Uist's identity as an island is perhaps slightly compromised by the modern, but extremely convenient, causeways linking it to Berneray (Bearnaraigh) in the north and Grimsay (Griomasaiagh) and Benbecula (Beinn na Faoghla) in the south.

PLANNING Guided Walks

Check at the Lochmaddy TIC (opposite) for details of the **RSPB's** (☎ 0779 504 7294) summer program of guided walks on North Uist.

Information Sources

The community website www.uistonline.com is a useful source of information about the island and includes accommodation listings.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

British Regional Airlines (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.britishairways.com) inter-island flights from Stornoway land at Benbecula airport, between North and South Uist (two flights Monday to Friday). **British Airways/Loganair** flies between Glasgow and Barra via Benbecula (two flights Monday to Friday). **Highland Airways** (☎ 0845 450 2245; www.highlandairways.co.uk) flies daily between Benbecula and Inverness. Buses meet most flights to take you to Lochboisdale or Lochmaddy for onward connections north or south.

EVAL

Duration	3½–4 hours
Distance	8 miles (13km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Drim Sidinish
Nearest Towns	Lochmaddy (opposite), Clachan na Luib (opposite)
Transport	private
Summary	The highest peak in North Uist gives a superb panoramic view of the maze of lochans and land that comprise the Uists, and as far south as the Isle of Rum.

At 347m (1138ft), Eaval is famous for sometimes featuring on the route of the Hebridean Challenge, an annual team marathon from Barra to Lewis, involving run-

ning, cycling and kayaking. Consequently, there's a clear, if often muddy, path all the way from the end of the Locheport road at Drim Sidinish (Druim Saighdinis). It might not be particularly high but the summit affords outstanding views near and far. The unavoidable causeway not far from the start should be dry except after heavy rain and at very high tide. The walk described involves 350m of ascent and is a simple out-and-back route.

The name Eaval, from two Norse words *ey fjall*, meaning 'island fell' or 'hill', accurately describes its situation. With the waters of Loch Obisary (Obasaraigh) and several smaller lochs on three sides, and Loch Eport (Euphort) and the open sea also nearby, Eaval is almost an island. Rising steeply on all sides, it dominates the southeastern corner of North Uist.

Alternative With suitable transport arrangements, a through walk is possible, descending southwest from the summit to the shore of the narrow strait between North Uist and Grimsay. You can then work your way around the long, deep inlet of Oban nam Muca-mara and finally head cross-country to the end of a minor road at Cladach Chairinis, which is about 1 mile from the A865.

PLANNING Maps & BOOKS

Eaval is on the OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 22 *Benbecula & South Uist*; the adjoining map to the north, No 18 *Sound of Harris & St Kilda*, is useful for orientation and identification of local landmarks. Alternatively, use OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 454 *North Uist & Benbecula*.

North Uist in History & Legend by widely published Bill Lawson is both informative and entertaining.

NEAREST TOWNS Lochmaddy (Loch nam Madadh)

☎ 01876

A quiet village on the east coast enjoying a superbly scenic setting beside the islet-studded loch, Lochmaddy is the port for North Uist.

The **TIC** (☎ 500321; lochmaddy@visithebrides.com) opens for late ferry arrivals and has a pretty good range of books and maps.

SLEEPING & EATING

Lochmaddy Hotel (☎ 500331; www.lochmaddyhotel.co.uk; s/d £51/96, mains £8-12; ☺ lunch & dinner), a traditional building on the outside, up-to-date within, specialises in seafood.

Taigh Chearsabhagh (☎ 500293; mains £2-4; ☺ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat; ☑) is a museum, arts centre, café and community meeting place rolled into one. The café offers brilliant home baking and great coffee.

There's a small grocer's shop near the post office.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

CalMac (☎ 08705 650000; www.calmac.co.uk) operates the ferry to and from Uig on the Isle of Skye (passenger/car £10/46, 1¼ hours, at least three daily). Coming from South Harris, catch the small CalMac vehicle ferry from Leverburgh to Berneray (passenger/car £6/25, one hour, up to four daily).

Various bus companies operate between Berneray and Lochmaddy, with connections southwards; for details consult the **Western Isles Council** (www.cne-siar.gov.uk) guide to *Bus and Ferry Services, Uist and Barra*.

By road, Lochmaddy is on the A865, 6 miles (9.5km) from Otternish and 50 miles (80km) from Lochboisdale.

Clachan na Luib

☎ 01876

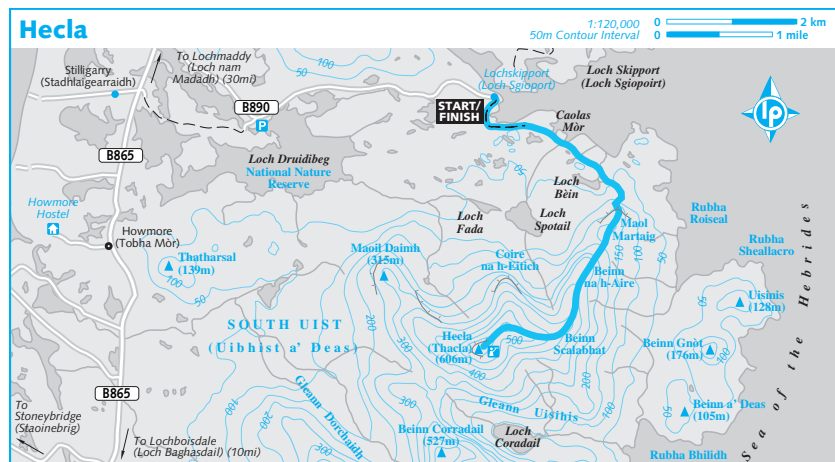
Clachan na Luib is a scattering of houses around a major road junction (A867 and A865), 7.5 miles (12km) south of Lochmaddy, at a point where North Uist is almost split in two. There's plenty of accommodation to the northwest, along the A865, and south towards Grimsay and Benbecula. The following is just a tiny selection.

SLEEPING & EATING

Shell Bay Caravan & Camping Site (☎ 01870 602447; shellbaylin@aol.com; Linnidate, Benbecula; unpowered/powered sites for 2 £12/14) on the southwest coast of the island of Benbecula, is the nearest camp site and has good facilities.

Taigh Mo Sheanair (☎ 580246; camach@amservice.net; Camach; dm £14; ☑) means 'my grandfather's house' in Gaelic, as the owner proudly proclaims. It's a comfortable hostel, right beside a lovely sandy beach west of Clachan na Luib.

Temple View Hotel (☎ 580676; www.templeviewhotel.co.uk; Carinish; s/d £50/90, mains £8-15; ☺ lunch &



Polochar Inn (☎ 700215; www.polocharinn.co.uk; Pollachar; s/d £40/70, lunch mains £6-8, dinner mains £9-12), 7.5 miles southwest of town, has grown from the original 1695 inn to a popular, friendly, very relaxed place overlooking the Sound of Barra. The food is great; chips are banished, local produce is foremost, and the chefs are not afraid to experiment – imagine monkfish marinated in basil and ginger.

There's a Co-op supermarket at Daliburgh, near the junction of the A865 and the B888 to Eriskay.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

CalMac (☎ 08705 650000; www.calmac.co.uk) operates a ferry service between Oban and Lochboisdale (passenger/car £21/77, 5½ hours, four weekly). There's also a link with Castlebay on the Isle of Barra (passenger/car £6/35, two hours, three weekly).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts and finishes at Lochskipport, at the end of the B890, which branches from the A865 about 2 miles (3.5km) north of Howmore. Lochskipport is 4 miles (6.5km) from the A865. Park beside the road.

THE WALK

Follow the road to a point about 120m beyond the end of the sealed section and turn off right (south) along a wide path. It's clear enough as it skirts the shore of Loch Skipport to the ruined stone buildings on the western side of Caolas Mòr. From here,

keep close to the shore and cross the stream issuing from Loch Spotaill. Go up the slope on its far side then head southeast across moorland, over a small stream draining a tiny, diamond-shaped lochan, and on to cross the burn from Loch Bèin just below the outlet (about an hour from the start).

Keep seaward of the cliffs above Loch Bèin and a surprisingly easy line of ascent opens up, through the crags of **Maol Martaig**. Cairns, not always in line of sight, mark the way over the highest ground, although there's no continuous path, up to Beinn na h-Aire. Once you reach this rocky eyrie the rest of the walk is relatively easy, over not-such-rough ground to the minor summit of Beinn Scalabhat (1½ hours from Loch Bèin). Traverse the southern slope of the ridge to reach the next cairn-crowned top (564m) then dip across the bealach and go up to the rock-and-grass summit of **Heda** (35 minutes from Beinn Scalabhat). There's a veritable feast of islands and mountains in the view, notably Skye's Red and Black Cuilins and flat-topped MacLeod's Tables to the east, and the Harris 'hills' in the north.

The descent is much easier, threading together a line of grass, rock and heather, down to Maol Martaig. From here, drop down to the west initially then swing north to avoid the almost unbroken cliffs on the north face of this bump, and go on to the north shore of Loch Bèin (nearly two hours from the top). The direction is then north-west, past two small lochans and across

Loch Spotaill's outlet stream; a path of sorts leads to the next small inlet. Continue generally close to the shore, past another tiny bay on the western shore of Caolas Mòr, then head west through a shallow valley. Pass the substantial ruin of a stone cottage and cross another shallow valley, where the track that you followed earlier in the day becomes clear. Follow it back to the start (1¼ hours from Loch Bèin).

BARRA

Barra (Barraigh) and neighbouring Vatersay are the southernmost of the inhabited Western Isles and the most westerly populated part of Scotland. They have a unique edge-of-the-world feeling; here you can be most keenly aware of the power and vastness of the Atlantic Ocean. There's plenty of good walking on both islands, with the central undulating ridge, outlying 'hills' and beaches in the north, and mountain and beach walks on Vatersay (Bhatarsaigh) linked to Barra by a causeway.

Barra is about 8 miles (13km) long and 7 miles (11km) wide. A rugged, rocky ridge of Lewisian gneiss stretches north to south for nearly its full length, with the highest point, Heaval (Sheabhal; 383m) at the southern end. The northern tip, centred around Eoligarry (Eòlaigearraidh), which is all low hills and machair, is joined to the rest of the island by two vast beaches (one serving as the island's airfield) and a slender strip of dry land. In the southwest corner, Ben Tangaval (Beinn Tangabhal; 333m) forms a spectacular bulwark against the Atlantic Ocean. Typically, the east coast is rocky, indented and relatively sheltered, while the west coast is graced by superb beaches and fine stretches of machair, carpeted with wildflowers during summer.

PLANNING

There's no formal camping ground on Barra; discreet wild camping on unfenced ground (usually close to the beaches) is OK; take care to leave no trace of your presence.

Maps

You'll need either OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 31 *Barra* or OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 452 *Barra & Vatersay*.

Information Sources

The island's own website, www.isleofbarra.com, provides an informative introduction to Barra and includes a detailed accommodation list.

GETTING AROUND

The island's bus services, run by **H Macneil** (☎ 01871 810262) and **R Macmillan** (☎ 01871 890366) operate Monday to Saturday and are frequent enough; buses connect with arriving and departing ferries and flights. There's also a **taxi service** (☎ 01871 810590) or you could **hire a bike** (☎ 01871 810284) to get around, so your own four wheels aren't essential, especially if you're not tied to a tight timetable. Public transport timetables are available from the TIC in Castlebay (p252).

HEAVAL

Duration	3½–4 hours
Distance	5.5 miles (9km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Craigston
Finish	Castlebay (p252)
Transport	bus

Summary Heaps of variety in the climb to Barra's highest peak: unsurpassed all-round views, prehistoric and more recent features and the moorland ridge dissected by deep passes.

It's easy enough to dash up and down Heaval (Sheabhal; 383m) from the road crossing the southern foot of the mountain, but the approach described here, along the island's central spine, is more scenic and varied and involves less seriously steep climbing. Although it is quite a popular walk, there isn't a continuous defined path, nor any cairns other than on the summits; most of the going is over grass and broken rock. The total ascent is 555m.

Near the start of the walk you'll pass a restored, thatched cottage (*dubharaidh* in Gaelic), which houses a museum about island life; it's open most days in summer. Further on, the route takes you past Dùn Bharpa, a Neolithic (Stone Age) chambered burial cairn, built around 5000 years ago. High on the steep southern slopes of Heaval stands Our Lady of the Sea, a marble statue of the Madonna and child, symbolising the

islanders' main religious faith; it's not easy to find, being off the best line of descent.

Alternative It's perfectly possible to make this walk into a superb full-length traverse by starting on the A888 at its highest point, between Beinn Chliaid to the north and Beinn Bheireasaigh to the south. In the absence of a defined path, head generally south, with many subtle variations, to join the main walk at Grianan. Allow about three hours for this 6.5-mile (10.5km) route.

NEAREST TOWN Castlebay (Bàgh a' Chaisteil)

☎ 01871

Castlebay, a large village rather than a town, and huddled around the sheltered harbour in the south, is the 'capital' of Barra. The helpful **TIC** (☎ 810336; castlebay@visithethebrides.com; Main St; ☎ daily), just north of the ferry pier, opens for late ferry arrivals, stocks maps and books and can handle accommodation bookings.

SLEEPING & EATING

Dunard Hostel (☎ 810443; www.dunardhostel.co.uk; Castlebay; tw & d £30) is a small, friendly place close to the ferry terminal.

Faire Mhaoldonaich (☎ 810441; www.fairemhaoldonaich.com; Nasg; s/d £28/50) overlooks the bay from the road to Vatersay. The rooms are

pleasantly furnished (ask for No 2) and breakfast is first-rate.

Ocean View B&B (☎ 810590; www.beatonbarra.co.uk; Borve (Borgh); s/d £22/40, dinner £7) is a great place for watching sunsets and enjoying good breakfasts.

Castlebay Hotel (☎ 810223; mains £9-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) specialises in local seafood, which it does very well indeed, using a range of sauces to complement cockles and crab. Vegetarians will have to hope they're happy with the lone offering.

For self-catering supplies, there's a Co-op supermarket, a licensed grocer and Barra's community shop, Co-Chomunn Bharraidh.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

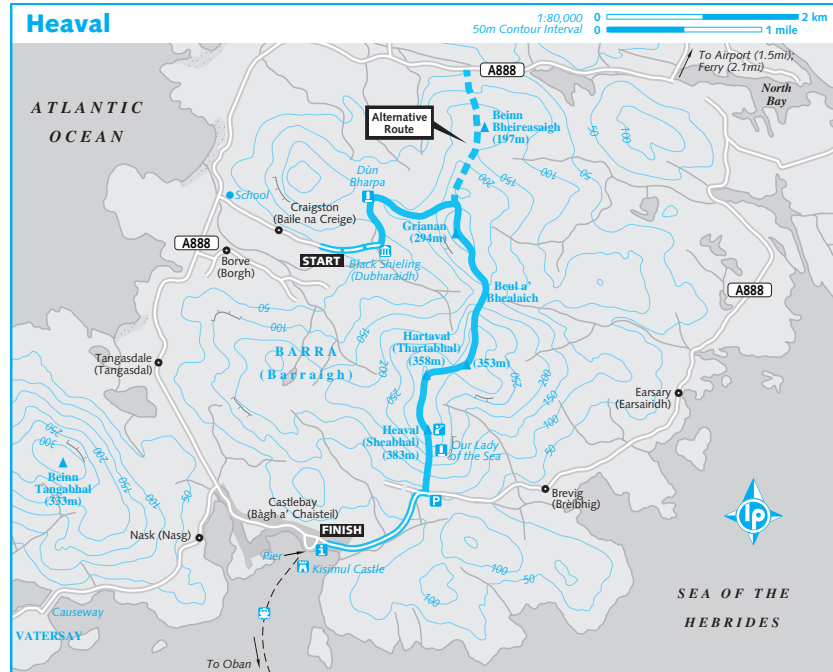
The timetable's warning 'Barra Flights are subject to Tide' isn't a joke. Barra's airport is Tràigh Mhòr ('big beach'). **British Airways/Loganair** (☎ 0870 850 9850; www.britishairways.com) operates flights from Glasgow (£75, one hour, two flights Monday to Saturday). This service also links Barra and Benbecula (£30, 20 minutes). There's a small tearoom at the airport.

CalMac (☎ 08705 650000; www.calmac.co.uk) ferries from Oban (passenger/car £21/77, 5¼ hours, at least three weekly) and Lochboisdale (passenger/car £6/35, 1¼ hours, at least three weekly) call at Castlebay.

SHORT WALK

The small island of **Vatersay**, tied to Barra by a causeway southwest of Castlebay, is graced by three outstandingly beautiful beaches, all in its gently undulating southern half. Walking here is delightfully easy, mostly across short, cropped grass. A 4-mile (6.4km) waymarked walk circuits this part of the island and affords fine wide views, especially south to the uninhabited islands of Pabbay and Mingulay; allow two to 2¼ hours. Carry OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 31. Buses operated by **R Macmillan** (☎ 890366) and **H Macneil** (☎ 810262) operate between Castlebay post office and Vatersay village, about 400m south of the start of the walk (20 minutes, at least three services Monday to Saturday). There are no shops on the island; a small café may be open at the northern end of Vatersay Bay.

The walk is waymarked from a small car park on the east side of the road, 400m north of the village. Soon you pass the Annie Jane memorial then drop down to Bagh Siar (West Bay). At its southern end cross a stile at a fence corner, traverse the slope and go up to the slight remains of Dun Bhatarsaigh. Descend south across a tiny burn then go southeast to an old grassed stone wall; turn right up to a standing stone. Climb a little then continue north and east across country to overlook Bagh a'Deas; descend to the shore. From the eastern end of the bay, go up across grassland. Soon you're above a wide glen, where the skeletal remains of Eorisdale village stand gauntly near the shore. Turn north across a slight saddle then swing gradually west to follow the shore of Vatersay Bay. Eventually, walk along the beach to a wide gap in the fringing dunes to reach the car park from where you started.



From the north, a CalMac ferry plies between Eriskay (linked to South Uist by causeway and bridge) and Ardmhor on Barra (passenger/car £6/18, 40 minutes, four daily).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts at the end of the minor road through the village of Craigston (Baile na Creige), where there's an informal car park. Alternatively, catch a Castlebay–Eoligarry bus (£1, seven minutes, at least three Monday to Saturday), get off at the junction on the main road and walk nearly 1 mile to the start.

THE WALK

From the end of the sealed road continue along the vehicular track to a point opposite the black shieling on the right. Go through a gate and head up the hillside with a fence on your left; follow it northeast then north for a short distance. Look out for a prominent waymarker post up to the right; continue to it then go on to **Dùn Bharpa**, crossing a stile over a fence en route (about

45 minutes from the main road). Sitting in a shallow gap in an east–west ridge, the dùn is a large, sprawling mound of small stones, with a huge capstone (or lid) on top.

Go back over the stile then head east across flattish moorland to the foot of the very steep western side of the central ridge. Climb up a broad, grassed gully to the obvious gap on the ridge then south and up to the summit of **Grianan** (294m), about an hour from the dùn. Descend steeply to Beul a' Bhealaich, taking care not to overshoot and finish up east of and below the gap. From the gap, angle up the steep, grassy and rocky hillside, southeast then south to a minor summit at 353m (marked with a miniature cairn). Then go sharply down, across a narrow slit as the ridge bends markedly to the west, and up to the main top of **Hartaval** (Thartabhal; 358m), an hour from Grianan. From here the ridge regains its north–south orientation as you dip across a gap then quickly dispose of the final climb to the survey cairn on **Heaval** (Sheabhal; 383m). The view is unsurpassed – from the mountains of Harris to the southernmost

isles of Mingulay and Berneray (both uninhabited), and with Castlebay and Kisimul Castle (ancestral home of the Clan Macneil) at your feet.

The descent is extremely steep and unrelenting, over grass and rock. Heading south and southeast, aim for a small but prominent quarry on the south side of the road about 200m east of a sharp bend. There's a stile here, or use a gate about 100m east. The centre of Castlebay is less than 1 mile downhill from here (about an hour from Heaval's summit).

MORE WALKS

HARRIS Scalpay (Scalpaigh)

Scalpay is a small island, linked to the mainland by a bridge, guarding the entrance to East Loch Tarbert. A scenically varied, 8-mile (13km) waymarked circuit of the island takes in Eilean Glas, a historic lighthouse (one of Scotland's earliest), and the island's highest point, Ben Scoravick (104m). The route is shown on OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 14. The **Scalpay Minibus** (☎ 01859 540356) plies between Tarbert and the main village (£1, 25 minutes, at least three services Monday to Friday); **North Harris Motor Services** (☎ 01859 502250) does the run on Saturday. To reach the start, follow roads from the village ('Baile') to Outend, where there's a small car park. The route starts about 30m back along the road; generally, it's easy to follow.

The only potentially confusing section comes after you've left the lighthouse. Return to the gate in the stone wall and turn right immediately. Follow the wall almost to its end then pick up the waymarker posts on the slope ahead. They end near the outlet of Loch an Duin. Follow a vehicle track to a minor road; it leads to the main road above North Harbour. Turn left to return to the village or the car park. There aren't any cafés or pubs on the island; **Scalpay Mini Market** (🕒 Mon-Sat) sells takeaway rolls and hot drinks.

Toe Head (Goban Tobha)

Toe Head, the northwest extremity of Harris, offers a variety of walks: an easy ramble to a tiny chapel on the southern shore (3.2 miles/5km); a longer and rougher return

walk around the east and north coast to Toe Head (8.6 miles/14km); and a climb to 365m-high Chaipaval (4.2 miles/6.6km). Use OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 18. These walks are approached from the village of Northton, 2 miles northwest of Leverburgh. About 30m short of the road end, there's a small car park on the left above a small beach. **Hebridean Transport** (☎ 01851 705050) bus service W10 between Tarbert and Leverburgh goes via Northton (£3, 33 minutes, at least four services Monday to Saturday).

SOUTH UIST Loch Druidibeg National Nature Reserve

This 1660-hectare reserve, managed by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), protects most of the habitats easily seen in the Uists. A 5-mile (8km) self-guided walk explores this diversity and is just the thing when the mountains are clouded in; allow 2½ hours.

The reserve extends from the machair grassland on the west coast, across a brackish lagoon to the loch and surrounding peaty moorland. Extensive and shallow, Loch Druidibeg is dotted with islands. On some you can see a relatively rare sight in the Western Isles, trees (juniper, willow and rowan), and one is home to a colony of heron. One of Scotland's few native populations of greylag geese lives around the loch. Beside the Lochskipport road a small plantation includes the only mature Scots pine in the Uists; if you're here in early spring you might just hear a cuckoo. On the moorland, red grouse and deer are possible sightings, and it's easier to hear the lonely piping of the golden plover than to see the bird itself.

The most convenient place to start the walk is from a car park on the Lochskipport road, which branches from the A865 road 4.7 miles south of the Benbecula causeway. Walk back along the road; cross the main road and continue west to the start of the waymarked section, near Loch Druidibeg on the left. For more information visit **SNH's office** (☎ 01870 620238) at Stilligarry (Stadh-laigearraidh), beside the A865.

BARRA Eoligarry (Eòlaigearraidh)

The northern tip of Barra has two of the island's most important historic sites. Here, a 6-mile (9.5km) partly waymarked walk

starts and finishes at the former South Uist ferry pier. It visits a cemetery in which are the remnants of St Barr's Chapel (Cille-Bharra), dating from early Christian times, and a small building protecting some fascinating ancient carved stones. Next comes Dun Scurrival (Dùn Sgùrabhal), an Iron Age fort, then it's over Ben Eoligarry (102m) and down to the long Tràigh Eais

and back past the airport. Use OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 31. Buses operated by **R Macmillan** (☎ 01871 890366) and **H Macneil** (☎ 01871 810262) link Castlebay and Eoligarry (£2, 30 minutes, at least three services Monday to Saturday). If you go by car, try to time the walk to coincide with the arrival of a flight at Barra airport (Tràigh Mhór), a truly amazing sight.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'