

## TRIP 5: NORTH-WEST SCOTLAND

This trip was made over three weeks in May and June 2014. I travelled by train, bus and ferry, in particular the D&E Coaches Summer Service 804 from Inverness to Durness. Also highly recommended are the beautiful ferry crossings from Ullapool to Stornoway and from Tarbert to Uig. Surprisingly to me, I found it necessary to book b&bs in advance as many were already full. Place names are spelt according to the latest OS maps.

### 60: Badentarbat Beach, Coigach, Wester Ross

The drive from Ullapool to the Summer Isles, however you do it, is unforgettable. I did it as the only passenger of the local bus driver so was able to view it all and ask questions at the same time. First, there is the view north-west along Loch Broom from Ardmair towards the Summer Isles; then there is the drive between Ben More Coigach and Stac Polly past three consecutive lochs, looking back and forth in amazement. Finally, the road emerges at the lovely beach of Achnahaird before crossing a short stretch of moorland to Achiltibuie and your first proper sight of the Summer Isles.

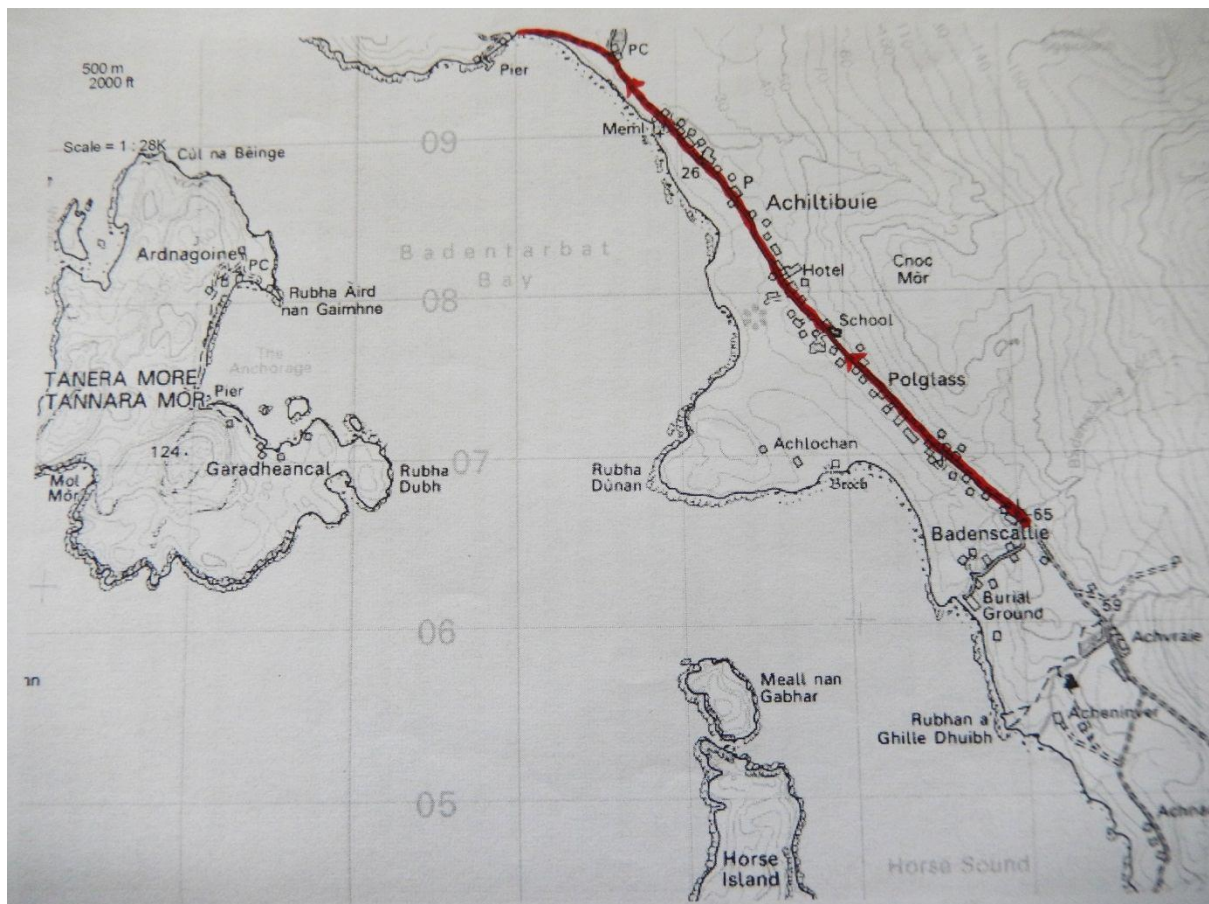


Photo 1143: Map of the first part of the trail: each square is 1k (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

I was bowled over by the dream-like quality of this view with low-lying islands of various shapes and sizes dotted over the wide expanse of water where Loch Broom meets the Minch. The bus takes you down the coast to Badenscallie. I suggest you get off there and walk back along the coast road past Polglass and Achiltibuie towards Polbain for a more leisurely view of the Isles. To me, the view improves as you proceed further north-west until you reach Badentarbat, a beach between Achiltibuie and Polbain which also gives its name to the whole bay between the coast and the island of Tanera More. Here you can find a delightful spot from which to survey the surroundings:

North – a marshy, reedy lake nestles in a shallow green valley leading back to two solitary houses on the far slope; sheep were lying contentedly on the green between the road and the marsh

East – Stac Polly's jagged crest peers over the intervening moorland with Cul Mor peering in turn over its shoulder and Cul Beag off to the right

South-East – the Ben More Coigach massif lowers over Achiltibuie, Polglass and Badenscallie, whose houses are strung out like garments on a washing line down the coast; over Badenscallie can be seen the snow-topped peaks of Beinn Dearg and Sgurr Mor way beyond Ullapool

South-East to South-West – the mountains of Wester Ross prick the sky in an unruly but unbroken line, starting with the triple peak of An Teallach and stretching away to the distant peaks of Torridon in the south-west; over Horse Island, the rounded shape of Beinn Ghoblach lies beneath An Teallach; most of the other Summer Isles cannot be seen, which leaves a clear arc of silver-grey, sparkling water over which the mountains are ranged in their full glory

South-West – the end of the mountains coincides with the eastern edge of Tanera More, the largest of the Summer Isles, which obscures the other isles; in its centre, some of the houses around The Anchorage can be seen, while its northern end slides behind the pier that lies 300m away on the mainland

West – a rocky shore runs from the pier and continues in front of you as a stony beach displaying the detritus of an apparently defunct fishing industry: old boats, red plastic buoys, rusting anchors, fraying rope and three huge rusting iron buoys; at the western end of the beach there is a house surrounded by a protective collar of small trees and shrubs and beneath it lies a picturesque little white cottage with a yellow door and window-frame; in front of this, a footbridge crosses a stream where reeds sprout in a pretty, grassy culvert; the stream then curls towards the sea in a chattering S-shape

North-West – across the road a dilapidated fishing shed sits beneath the brown dome formed by the lower slopes of Meall an Fheadain





Photo 298: over the Summer Isles from the southern peak of Meall an Fheadain

peak has several suitable boulders to sit on and can include a view of Polbain at the bottom of the hillside. You also have a great view over the Summer Isles to the mountains of Wester Ross (Photo 298). My preferred spot, though, was around (but not on top of) the northern and higher peak because it has the better all-round view:

South – from this height, you can see an arc of Summer Isles from Horse Island to Eilean Dubh which lies between you and the majestic sweep of mountains on the skyline from An Teallach to the mountains of Torridon – a classic view to rival anything else in Scotland

South-West – the rest of the Summer Isles (and there are lots from Bottle Island round to Glasleac Beg) float serenely between you and the flattish peninsulae around Mellon Udrigle and Cove; in a notch between them and the higher mountains, you can just discern the Cuillins of Skye

West – a loch lies at the bottom of the hill between you and Meall Dearg, over whose left shoulder Glasleac Mor appears; in the far distance, the mountains of Harris shimmer in the hazy light (if you are lucky)

North-West – the township of Altandhu hugs the coast with a couple of lochs sparkling behind; beyond the coast, the sea disappears into the horizon

North – first, there are the lochans and moorland of the peninsula towards Rubha Coigach, then the clear expanse of Enard Bay, bounded to the north by the flat Stoer Peninsula



North-East – over the sands of Achnahaird Bay, the islands of the inner reaches of Enard Bay lead to the moorlands and lochs of Assynt, punctuated by the serrated ridge of Quinag, the whaleback of Suilven and the pyramid of Canisp; these three distinctive and broody mountains are accentuated by the flat terrain around them

East – three more distinctive mountains stand out from their surroundings: the triple peak of Cul Mor, the razor ridge of Stac Polly and the asymmetrical peak of Cul Beag

South-East – the various peaks of Ben More Coigach cluster around the deep hole between them and consume the south-eastern half of Coigach; beneath their slopes, the line of houses stretches along the coast to Culnacraig; way beyond the houses, snow-capped peaks fill the gap between Ben More Coigach and An Teallach (Photo 301)



Photo 301: from near the northern peak of Meall an Fheadain to Ben More Coigach

Apart from all I have described, the beauty of this spot is that in each of the eight directions there is a distinct and different kind of view to be enjoyed: the wide open sea, the myriad isles, the distant mountain ridges, the lochs and moors, the coastline and the brooding mountains of Assynt. Most of Coigach and Assynt is laid out before you into the bargain.

## 62: Rubha a'Mhadaidh-Ruaidh (Fox Point), Coigach, Wester Ross

The trail doesn't end here, though: you can see your route to the north-east, where you head for the track leading up to a mast. This takes you to the village of Altandhu. On the way down, look left for the view between Meall an Fheadain and Meall Dearg over two lochs towards the distant mountain ridge. If you wish, you can refuel at An Fuaran pub. Ask for permission to walk through their campsite around the bay towards Old Dornie. You walk past a lovely bay, especially with the evening sun shining down on it from the west. Stick to the path close to the shore and steer between the boggy bits. To go round the back of the harbour, you have to follow a rough path between the stony beach and a fence, treading on grass and old seaweed. Follow the road past two jetties where you find a signpost for Fox Point and Polbain. From here on, there are well-positioned guide-posts to help you on your way but you have to look for them. I particularly liked the one at the top of an awkward 20m rocky incline which reassures you that this is indeed the way.

As you round the coast, various Summer Isles come into view. When you see an old building on a promontory, head for it. This was in fact a salmon bothy, used for storage and rest by fishermen. From here, swan out to the point on yellow-freckled rocks with green grass and sea pinks in between. Find your spot out here, where it feels as if you are in the middle of the Summer Isles:

South – between Tanera More and Tanera Beg, Eilean Dubh appears

South-West – Tanera Beg and its many satellite islets

West – Glasleac Mor

North-West – Isle Ristol

North – the coast you have just walked

North-East – the russet tones of Meall Dearg, the hill seen from Meall an Fheadain, now looking much more formidable

East – Stac Polly and Cul Beag peer over the Polbain coast

South-East – over Badentarbat Bay, Ben More Coigach once again dominates the Achiltibuie coast; Tanera More completes the circle

I always love the ends of promontories, especially when surrounded by many islands and rocks so attractively coloured with yellow, green and pink. I had the added bonus of the sun going down over the Minch.

A guide-post to the north-east of the bothy shows you the return route. Further on, there is an unfortunate barbed-wire fence to cross, considering this is a recognised, way-

marked path. Make sure you go shorewards round the first houses you encounter to find a road leading back to the starting point by the entry sign for Polbain. The whole circular walk from Polbain took me five hours with stops at the pub and to write notes. On my first day in NW Scotland, I couldn't believe my luck in finding such a perfect trail to follow.



Photo 1879: The Summer Isles from near Polbain (copyright: Duncan I. McEwan/Stirling Gallery Publications, [www.stirlinggallery.co.uk](http://www.stirlinggallery.co.uk))

### 63: Cnoc Dabhaich, nr Lochinver, Assynt, Sutherland

Moving north into Assynt from the Summer Isles, there are two roads: the short one via the coast and Inverkirkaig and the longer one via Elphin and Inchnadamph. Even if you are heading for the main town, Lochinver, I suggest you take the longer road for its sheer beauty. The shorter road may be attractive, too, but I doubt if it has the wide open vistas of the inland route.

My next spot is on a fairly well-known path between Achmelvich and Baddidarach, a suburb of Lochinver. Obviously, it can be walked in either direction but I suggest you start in Achmelvich for three reasons: because it's easier to catch the 809 bus to Achmelvich than from it (see timetable for the reason), because you have the better views in front of you and because you end up where there are pubs, restaurants and accommodations.

Starting at the campsite in Achmelvich, then, first visit the lovely beach and further reaches of the campsite (not all campsites are an eyesore). When you've enjoyed the scenic bay, turn around and head east on the road. After about a kilometre, there is a road on the right signposted to Baddidarach. The road meanders through pretty woodland and lochland for another kilometre before it reaches the last house at Ardroe. Just before the end, a path



Photo 1460: Trail for spot 63 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

leads off left by a red corrugated iron roof, into a small valley and then up onto the moorland. Follow the path as it snakes through rock, bog and loch with occasional glimpses of the tops of Canisp and Suilven.

When Lochinver town comes into view, stop and look around for a hillock to your right with a cairn on top, which takes two minutes to climb. Once there, look for the next, larger hillock, also sporting a cairn, and head for that (five more minutes). Here there is a better all-round view, taking in most of Assynt, just as the view from Meall an Fheadain (spot 61) took in most of Coigach. In fact, you can see that spot away to the south-west:

South-West – across the mouth of Loch Inver and across Enard Bay lies Rubha Mor, the peninsula north of Polbain; Meall an Fheadain is the largest of the hills you can discern; beyond, you can make out the line of mountains that looked so beautiful from there

South – Loch Inver lies between you and the wooded slopes around Badnaban, Strathan and Inverkirkaig; then there are the moors and lochs of South Assynt before you come to Ben More Coigach, Stac Polly and Cul Beag, looking very different from this angle

South-East – Baddidarach lies at the bottom of the slope, followed by Lochinver town, whose surrounding forests contrast with the bare hillocks and lochs of Mid Assynt; from their midst rise the distinctive shapes of Cul Mor, now looking very wide, Suilven, now looking more sugarloaf, and Canisp, with the slope leading to its pyramid now visible



East – a vista of larger hills around Loch Assynt leads away towards Inchnadamph and Ben More Assynt, although Loch Assynt itself is hidden; Quinag's many peaks now have a dip in the middle but it's not at all clear why it got its name, which means 'water-spout' in Gaelic (that only becomes apparent as you round it from the east); nearer at hand, a pretty lochan lies just beyond the point where you left the path

North-East – more hills roll away towards NW Sutherland, where, on a clear day, Ben Stack, Arkle and Foinaven can be seen, almost in a line

North – more hills towards Drumbeg and Oldany

North-West – the hills you've just traversed with one house at Achmelvich visible and a little of the coast towards Stoer

West – yet more hills on the north side of Loch Inver with Soyea Island right in its mouth; on a clear day, you can see over the Minch to the mountains of Harris

After the pleasant but uneventful earlier part of the trail, I was surprised and delighted by this view encompassing all the varied aspects of the Assynt scenery.

Rejoin the path and soon you are descending past Darrach Cottage to a track, then a road, into Baddidarach. If you are starting from there, or just want to pop up to the spot, you turn right at the sign for Glendarrach, where a signpost says 'Public Footpath to Achmelvich'. Higher up, where there is an ambiguous fork, take the left turn which brings you to Darrach Cottage. The whole walk took me three hours, including an hour for stoppages.

#### 64: Loch Druim Suardalain, by Glencanisp Lodge, Assynt, Sutherland

This is quite a well-known trail (you can find it on [www.walkhighlands.co.uk](http://www.walkhighlands.co.uk) under 'River Inver and Glencanisp circuit') but my spot doesn't feature in their description. I also suggest you do the trail in the opposite direction, starting from Lochinver Harbour because this means you do the boring bit first and end with a crescendo. The road is signposted due east just before the harbour area and provides a pleasant 2 kilometre stroll through typical Assynt scenery of low, rocky hills, shrubs, small trees and heather with the occasional lochan for light relief. After 2k you reach a proper loch, Loch Druim Suardalain, and skirt its northern edge until you enter the grounds of Glencanisp Lodge.

This large house and the whole Glencanisp Estate (which covers much of central Assynt) was bought with the help of a large lottery grant in 2005 from private owners by the Assynt Foundation "on behalf of the community to make the land accessible to all" (quote from estate workers). However, the lodge is sometimes let out to private parties in order to raise funds for the upkeep of the estate and for widening its clientele: "Luxury 12 bedroom Victorian hunting lodge in an idyllic setting, available to hire weekly as a whole exclusive unit..." (direct quote from an advertisement). For this reason, you are requested to check with

the office before seeking out this spot, in case a party has hired the lodge “as a whole exclusive unit”.



Photo 1856: Trail for spot 64 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

If you are given permission, cross the lawn at the front of the lodge to find a path leading into the trees. Follow the twisting and very pretty path onto a south-pointing promontory in the middle of the loch and find your spot – actually there is only one, right at the end. The view is dominated by two features: first, the tranquil beauty of the loch – its shape, its size, its trees, its islets – that equals anything the Lake District has to offer, except perhaps Derwentwater and Grasmere; and second, the towering presence of Suilven to the south-east, now seen in its sugarloaf aspect only 5k away (Photo1883) – Canisp can also be seen but less dominant as it’s about 10k distant. At the western end of the loch, there is a glorious stand of pines to counter-balance the magnetic pull of Suilven. I was there on a cloudy day – I can only imagine the beauty of this spot when the sun is out.

Returning to the lodge, go round the back to find a track that leads north (not east towards Suilven), up the rise past some new buildings. My guess is that these are to provide additional facilities for guests (hopefully not just huntin’, shootin’ and fishin’ types). I hope the Assynt Foundation can achieve its aim of balancing rich men’s sport with opening up the estate to the not-so-rich.

The track becomes a path at the top of the rise, from where you can see Quinag to the north-east. Further on, turn left at a metal gate, where the path descends into Dubh Clais (Black Valley), passing a ruined blackhouse. Despite its name, I found this glen very attractive, particularly at its lower end where it opens out into a more verdant scene with a tumbling stream and tiny trees. Then it veers right to join the River Inver at another attractive spot, an open, marshy area with a wood to your left and an inviting path to your right that penetrates the upper reaches of the Inver towards Quinag in the distance.

Your path goes to the left and enters the woods to follow the south bank of the Inver for 2k down to Loch Inver. At first, the path is narrow and rough, while the Inver is placid and fairly wide. Later on, past a waterfall, the river becomes rough and tumbling through a mini-gorge, while the path enters the sylvan calm of green woodland. This rough and tumble makes a fine crescendo to climax the trail, rather than having a 40 minute slog down the road from Glencanisp Lodge. The whole thing took me 3 hours, including 45 minutes at Glencanisp Lodge.

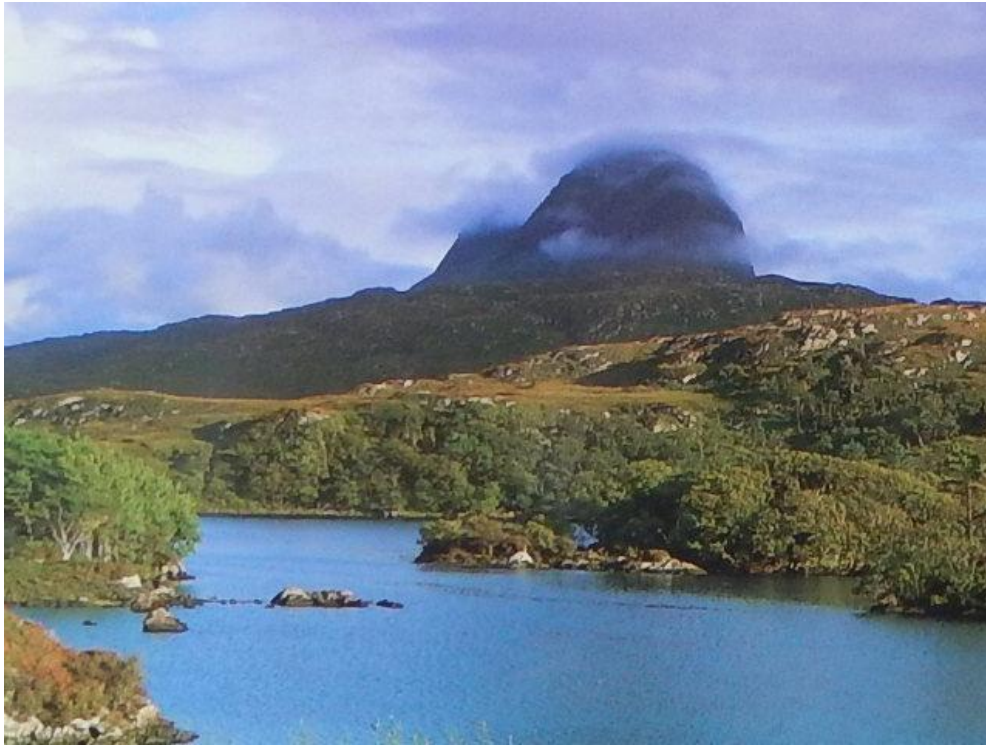


Photo 1883: Suilven from Loch Druiam Suardalain - the spot is on the left (copyright: Mike Guy/Stirling Gallery, [www.vkguy.co.uk](http://www.vkguy.co.uk), [www.stirlinggallery.co.uk](http://www.stirlinggallery.co.uk))

#### 65: Cnoc at Culkein Drumbeg, Assynt, Sutherland

The featured trail in the Drumbeg area is up one peat road and down the other to the south of the village but I found a much shorter and more rewarding one to the north of Culkein Drumbeg, a village 2k to the north-west of Drumbeg. The peat road trail is mentioned in local guides but is actually quite boring since it goes through typical Assynt scenery of heather, bog and loch surrounded by low hills. Having done it, I crossed the road and went along the Polchapple road to Culkein Lodge by the jetty. Just past the lodge, turn right up a short track to some sheds, turn right past the last shed to find a faint path and head for the largest hillock ('cnoc' in Gaelic). I chose to go along by the beach and up from the corner of the field. Once at the top, this magnificent view over North Assynt, Eddrachillis Bay and NW Sutherland hits you:



South-West – you look down the way you came up, past the field and the jetty to the green and pleasant inlet leading to the hamlet of Oldany

West – a pretty view over several islets to Oldany Island, which doesn't look like an island from here; over Oldany Island, you can catch the Stoer Peninsula, although neither the Old Man of Stoer (a sea stack) nor Stoer Point are visible

North-West – a few more islets and the open sea

North – across the mouth of Eddrachillis Bay, past the island of Meall Mor, to Handa Island; between Handa and the coast, you can glimpse the more distant coast around Droman and Sheigra 23k away

North-East – the many islets of Eddrachillis Bay sprinkle the waters between you and the mountains of NW Sutherland – Ben Strome, Cnoc Odhar and Ben Auskaird in the front row with Ben Stack, Arkle and Foinaven raising their taller heads behind

East – a rather nondescript view along the coast

South-East – a more attractive view across the bay of Port Dhroimbeag towards Drumbeg and Nedd and on up Gleann Leireag to the towering pinnacles of Quinag; further to the south, you come to Ben More Assynt and Canisp

South – across the green and pleasant turf of Culkein Drumbeg, Suilven appears, now in its guise of a whale, with Cul Mor behind; otherwise, it's the typical bumps and humps of Assynt over towards Lochinver



Photo 1462: Trail for spot 65 - including the peat road trail going south from Drumbeg (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)



I came down in the direction of Handa Island and worked my way round the coast towards Culkein Drumbeg. First there's a dramatic cove and cliff to view, then there is lovely, turfy walking, making a welcome change from the usual heather and bog. I had to cut inland at a forbidding fence and climb past a sheepfold to the next hillock and over an easier fence to a ruined blackhouse on a third hillock. This is just above the houses of Culkein Drumbeg and you can rejoin the road by a marsh, being careful not to disturb the highland cattle and sheep who sometimes hang out here. By the climb out of the village, there is a bench with a perfect view of the spot you have visited, the village and Eddrachillis Bay. Unbelievably, there were cars driving down here for literally a minute, turning round and shooting off to tick off the next whistle-stop on their itinerary. Turn left at the sign for 'Achloist' for a short-cut back to Drumbeg and another great view over Loch Drumbeg to Quinag, Canisp, Suilven and Cul Mor.

#### Interlude: the Gleann Leireag Path, Assynt, Sutherland

Although I didn't find a spot worthy of inclusion, I must mention the walk up Gleann Leireag from Nedd to Tumore beside Loch Assynt. I did it on an overcast and drizzly day so that I couldn't see anything of Quinag, apart from the bottom of its western scree. Nevertheless, the glen itself was worth the walk with an attractive loch at its head and a great view down Loch Assynt from the bealach (Gaelic for pass) before the descent to Tumore. I'm told the walk beneath Quinag on a clearer day is quite awe-inspiring.



Photo 1156: The road along the bottom runs along the north shore of Loch Assynt (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

The walk took me 5 hours from Drumbeg. Try to time your arrival at Tumore to coincide with the bus – I allowed 7 hours and had a 2 hour wait (hitching didn't work on this occasion). If you do have to wait in the drizzle, there's a nice tree ½ k down the road at Lochassynt Lodge.

#### 66: Rubha Sgobhairigh, Scourie, Sutherland

Next in line of picturesque villages on Scotland's north-west coast is Scourie. The layout of the village itself almost qualifies as a spot: if you stand at the turn-off to the cemetery, you have a good view of Scourie Bay, Scourie Lodge, Scourie Hotel, the main village, the campsite, the old village and Scouriemore all around you. Unfortunately, you are standing on a main road, which means automatic disqualification on my criteria.

You don't have to go far, though, for another spot that does justice to the delightful setting of Scourie. Go down past the cemetery to a signpost pointing along the coast. Follow the path out onto the headland of Rubha Sgobhairigh, where you find lots of cairns to choose from. One of them hit the spot for me more than the others:

West – Eilean a'Bhuic lies at the end of Rubha Sgobhairigh with open sea beyond

North-West – the cliffs at the western end of Handa Island with open sea beyond

North – the rest of Handa Island sloping green and gentle towards you; the Sound of Handa separates the island from the mainland and through it you can see Eilean Roin Mor up the coast by Droman; the promontory of Creag a'Mhail marks the northern end of Scourie Bay

North-East – a knobbly range of hills leads along the north side of Scourie Bay to Scourie Village, ending in a double-breasted hill, Creag a'Bhadaidh Daraich, above the pier

East – from the pier onwards the low-lying land becomes greener around the head of Scourie Bay, where Scourie Lodge, Scourie Hotel and the campsite stand out; in season, the yellow gorse stands out, as well; in the distance, Arkle is a brooding presence; the beaches of Scourie are protected by an arm of rocks projecting from beside the cemetery so that the inner waters of Scourie Bay are calm and tranquil

South-East – more knobbly terrain with Quinag peering over the top

South – Canisp is hidden but Suilven (looking even more like a tubby whale raising its tail-flukes), Stac Polly and Ben More Coigach are still visible over the islets of Eddrachillis Bay

South-West – the whole of the North Assynt coast from Nedd to Point of Stoer, ending with the pointed finger of the Old Man of Stoer

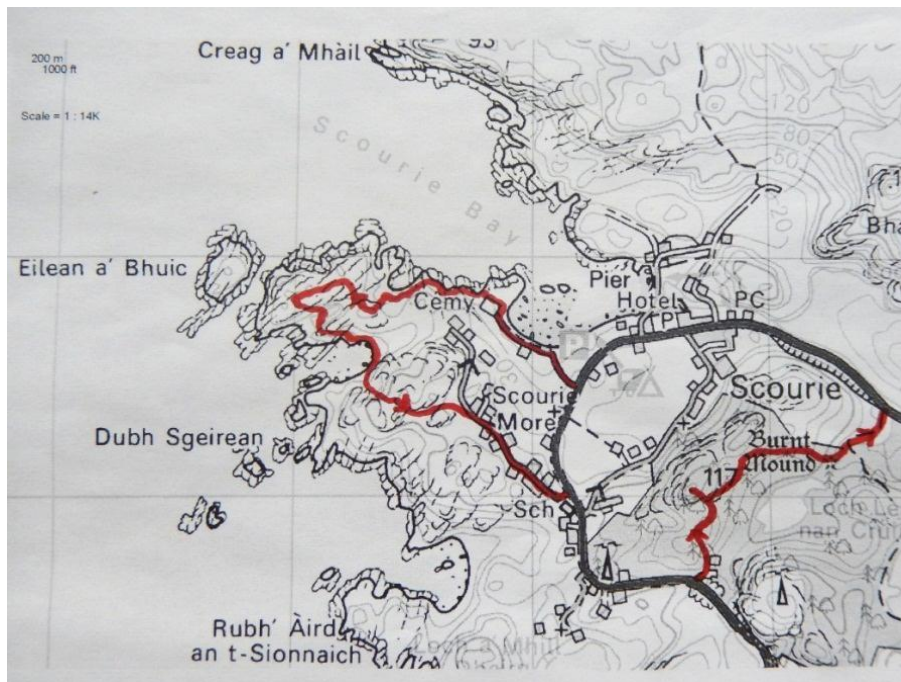


Photo 1463: Trail for spot 66 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

All around is the delightful ground you have been walking upon: knobs of rock with soft, heathery grass between, sporting bog cotton and various colours of tiny flowers – yellow, blue, pink and purple – and occasional sea birds patrolling their patch. Further afield, the inland mountains contrast nicely with the relative flatness of the Assynt coast and the sea; between the two, Scourie Bay nestles serenely, surrounded by its hills which manage to look knobbly and green at the same time (my visit was at the end of May).

Continue round the coast as far as you wish – at any point, you can cut inland to the houses of Scouriemore. I did so soon after a blue-littered stony beach with a marsh behind it since I also wanted to go up the hill behind Scourie Old Village. The road through Scouriemore brings you out by Scourie Primary School, which must have the best view of any school in Britain apart from the school in Timsgearraidh (see spots 70-72).

From the school, you can follow the main road south then round the corner by the electricity sub-station to a service road on the left with a green sign saying 'Leathad Woodland'. The woodland is still young and sparse but the path is well-maintained. It passes a beautiful, vaguely heart-shaped boulder with white, silver and grey striations, just before a left turn to the viewpoint on Cnoc a'Bhuthain. For me, this was 'not quite a spot', with a great view over Scourie, showing the lay-out of the whole area, including Handa Island, Rubha Sgobhairigh and Scouriemore. However, the views in the other directions (NE to SW) were less attractive, offering only a couple of lochs, Ben Stack and Arkle.

The made-up path continues to the north-east, eventually petering out, but a normal, heathery path brings you to Loch a'Bhadaidh Daraich and the road takes you back to Scourie.



## 67: Cnoc behind Sandwood Bay, Sutherland

Now we come to the jewel in the crown of NW Scotland – Sandwood Bay. Being something of a cynic, I was prepared to be disappointed by this bay, which features in so many ‘Top Ten’ lists, but it fully justifies the hype. It is just the most perfect bay I have ever seen, by which I mean the whole setting: bay, beach, dunes, lagoon, loch, surrounding hills, as described later on. I found two not-much-visited spots which took in more or less the whole scene and from which a fuller appreciation is possible than by simply walking along the beach as most people were doing (I was there on a glorious day so there were dozens of visitors).



Photo 1162: Trail for spots 67 and 68 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)



Most people drive to Blairmore where there is a car park and walk from there on a path well-maintained by the John Muir Trust. I had walked from Kinlochbervie (as far as the bus goes) and was staying at Sheigra, a little village a bit further on in a beautiful setting at the end of the road. So I set out from there. The idea was to go to the end of a track leading north-eastwards (the old peat road?) and then cut across to the main Sandwood Bay path. I did this but have to report that it was hard and slow going once I left the track. There is no path and, although it's only just over a kilometre, it took me 40 minutes of bobbing and weaving through humps and hollows and boggy bits. If you are interested, the way is over a ridge, past the north side of Lochan nan Sac, then head towards Craig Riabhach, the mountain with the peak pointing to the left. When you first see a rusted barbed-wire fence, look for a 10 metre gap rather than trying to cross it. Then it's an easy descent to the path.

After that struggle, the path was a delight, easy walking past several charming lochs with nice mountain views to the east. Sandwood Bay reveals itself as you round the shoulder of Druim na Buainn (Photo 355).



Photo 355: first view of Sandwood Bay, Cape Wrath in the distance

Once you have recovered the breath that has been taken away, don't go straight down to the beach but climb the green and beckoning cnoc straight ahead of you to hit a spot where you can see all this:

North-West to North-East – Sandwood Bay in all its glory; to the north-west, large dunes back the western end of the beach which abuts the rocky slopes of Druim na Buainn; to the north, the path descends to the beach through smaller dunes and a triangular lagoon intervenes between the beach and Sandwood Loch; on the beach, two rocky outcrops break

up the clean sweep of the sand; to the north-east, the lagoon is only just separated from the loch and past more substantial dunes, the loch empties onto the eastern end of the beach; just beyond, rises a rocky bluff where I predicted my next spot would be; the beach disappears behind the rocky bluff but the whole coast away as far as Cape Wrath (7k) can be seen

East – across Sandwood Loch to some steep hills

South-East – down the sausage shape of Sandwood Loch to Strath Shinary, a regular valley which eventually bends to the left; in the far distance, Foinaven crowns the scene

South – at the bottom of the cnoc, lie two buildings, one a sheepfold, the other the remains of Sandwood Lodge; behind them are some low hills

South-West – the path you have just descended

West – the bulk of Druim na Buainn precludes any further views

For me, the magnificence of this scene is made by the many facets which contribute to the whole: the loch and valley behind the bay, the lagoon in the midst of the dunes, the various sizes and shapes of the dunes, the pristine beach (kept pristine by volunteers who regularly clean up the usual rubbish dumped from the sea these days) and the view along the coast. All of this can only be seen from a few spots, of which this is one.

From here, I decided to walk down towards the lagoon, go between it and the loch, cross the outflow and climb the rocky bluff, seeking another spot, and then return along the beach. It was a truly lovely and memorable walk.....

## 68: Bluff to the North of Sandwood Bay, Sutherland

Now I was able to sample the delights of Sandwood Bay from close up. After a steep descent from the cnoc, I crossed some grass and entered the dune system. The grass of the dunes was interspersed with moss, daisies and a few thistles. Then I came across some grey rocks between the dunes and the loch: they had beautiful pink and white striations, often in wavy lines. A daisy-strewn tuft of grass at the high point of these rocks provided a lower vantage point for viewing the whole bay.

From here, continue round the north-west shore of the loch, passing a good view of the lagoon to your left. Keep always to the left of the loch until you see a way between the last two dunes. This passage is strewn with lovely purple and grey stones, also mainly striated. You emerge on the beach where the outflow from the loch is at its shallowest. In the summer, you don't even have to take your boots off (but after rain you will probably have to).

Choose your way up the bluff ahead. I was lucky enough to pass a particularly attractive free-standing boulder displaying pink, white, grey and brown colours, adorned also with green lichen, and standing on an equally attractive pedestal of wavy striations. You are making for a knob of rock on the skyline from where the views are simply wonderful:

North – along the coast to Cape Wrath, though most of the coast in between is not visible; neither is the north end of Sandwood Bay

North-East to East – the hills and mountains of North Sutherland, known as ‘The Parph’, much of it Ministry of Defence territory

East – Beinn Dearg and Creag Riabhach, seen previously from the path

South-East – looking down the length of Sandwood Loch, you can see Foinaven and Arkle in the distance

South – viewed across Sandwood Loch, Quinag appears yet again, as does Suilven, now juxtaposed with Quinag in an almost continuous ridge

South-West – now you see the best possible view of Sandwood Bay with its beach, dunes and lagoon seen length-ways from the right height; some of the dunes are like pimples, others like massive waves; the beach sweeps away majestically for over a kilometre until it is curtailed by the headland of Rubh’a’Bhuachaille, at the end of which the pointed sea-stack of Am Buachaille stands sentry - its landward edge reminded me of the faces seen on totem poles; the line of breaking waves is broken up to advantage by the two rocky outcrops, resulting in extra curls and swirls of surf; the outflow of the loch turns into a tangled skein of rivulets

West – the several islets of Am Balg lie about a kilometre offshore from Am Buachaille

North-West – down the bluff to some more rocky platforms under which the north end of Sandwood Bay lies hidden; out to sea, there is nothing until the Faroe Islands and Iceland

I cannot imagine how anyone could design a more perfect bay – plus, the sun was shining, unseen birds were twittering and the waves were breaking relentlessly like the sound of a high wind in the trees.

Predictably, I left the top of the bluff north-westerly to try and get a view of the north end of Sandwood Bay. This is possible from the rocks on the end of a spur which contains a whole basin of the beautifully striated rocks measuring about 40m by 20m. While this is probably the best view of Sandwood Beach, the loch and lagoon are partially obscured.

On the way down, I stumbled across a strange wall facing south-west with a rock bench behind it. I guess it is a shelter against south-westerly winds – I have read that Sandwood Bay can cut up rough in stormy weather.

The return along the beach was sheer pleasure: the whole beach had been rippled by south-westerlies but was otherwise as smooth a beach as I have ever seen with very few stones and no detritus - the volunteers from the John Muir Trust had done a good job (Photo 362).



Photo 362: pristine Sandwood Beach looking towards Am Buachaille

I returned to Sheigra along the main path rather than trying any short-cuts and was glad I did – the walk past the last and largest of the lochs, Loch na Gainimh, was delightful. All the way you are overlooked by a series of mountains to your left from Beinn Dearg to Arkle in the far south-east - and not a midge in sight, even though there was no wind.



Photo 364: last view of Sandwood Bay



## 69: Beinn na Bheirigh, Reef, Lewis, Western Isles

How do you match Sandwood Bay? Come to this part of Lewis: Traigh na Beirigh and Traigh Uige. To get here from there, you would do best to take the ferry from Ullapool to Stornoway. The early part of the crossing is almost as good as spots 60-62: the ferry sails to the south of the Summer Isles and provides spectacular mountain views. While the arrival in Stornoway is pleasant enough, the top place for scenery in Lewis is definitely the area of Uig, by which I mean the peninsular north-west of a line from Loch Resort to Little Loch Roag. This is heavenly countryside, most of which I had explored on a previous visit. This time I was spot-hunting and found four cracking ones to tell you about.

This trail starts from the village of Cnip at the western end of Traigh na Beirigh. Walk south-east along the road past the beach into the area of machair behind it. Much of this land is fenced off but you will have the chance to tread some machair later. You are in the middle of a flat expanse of remarkably green and fertile land, surrounded by the typical rocky hills of Lewis. The remains of a broch and a dun show that our ancestors chose to live here. After the machair, the road takes you between two of the hills towards Reef Village. When the first outbuildings of Reef appear, look for two gates on your left. Go through the left gate and climb towards the top of the hill (the fences shepherd you in the right direction).

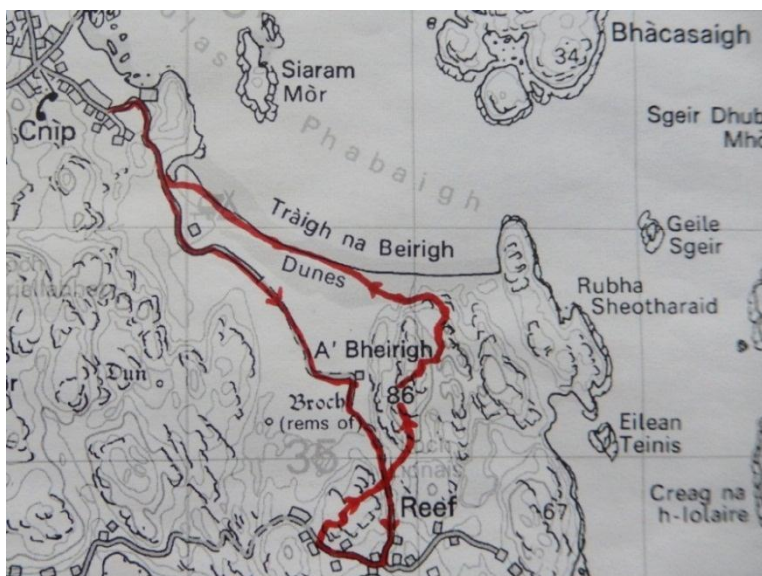


Photo 1464: Trail for spot 69 - including the detour to Suileachan (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

If you like monuments, you can make a detour to see an unusual contemporary one, constructed over the winter of 2013/14. To reach it, continue on to Reef Village and turn right. After 300m you will see a track and a notice-board to your right. The notice tells you about the Reef Raiders who stood up for crofters' rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Up the little hill beyond you arrive at Suileachan, a stone construction celebrating these men. It consists of two small enclosures linked by a passage-way beneath a mini-Stonehenge trilithon. The first enclosure contains a circular memorial radiating the men's names; the second contains a brazier with benches inside and outside the wall, which is used by the community at

Hogmanay and other celebrations. It's an attractive and thoughtful construction, tailored to the wishes of the community. If you wish, you can return to the two gates by descending from Suileachan to the north-east. The whole detour is about 1k.

Up at the top of the hill, which is called Beinn na Bheirigh, there are several rocky outcrops to choose from: one gives the best views, if you are prepared to stand up rather than sit down:

North – over Bhacasaigh Island to Seana Chnoc with Bearasaigh to its right, both sticking straight out of the sea, while Flodaaigh to the right of Bearasaigh is almost flat; together, these three form an attractive and contrasting trio, guarding the entrance to West Loch Roag

North-East – the mouth of West Loch Roag lies between you and the northern part of Bearnaraigh, a large island between the two arms of Loch Roag that just looks like a flattish part of the mainland from here

East – over the southern part of Bearnaraigh, the land appears mainly flat with a few medium-sized hills on the way to Stornoway

South-East – West Loch Roag expands and encloses many islands and several fish-farms; in the far distance rise the mountains of Southern Lewis, notably the “sleeping goddess” formed by Muaithabal and Mor Mhonadh – one theory is that the stones of Calanais were aligned to pay respect to this recumbent figure on the horizon

South – over the village of Reef and a branch of West Loch Roag to Geisiadar Village with the mountains of Harris looming on the horizon

South-West – over a branch of West Loch Roag to Cairisiadar Village, backed by the round bulk of Suaineabhal with Mealaisbhal, the tallest of the Uig hills, just visible to its right

West – in the foreground is the very green and flat machair you have just walked through, contrasting starkly with the rugged and rocky green and grey hills behind it; these hills lead away to Forsnabhal, a wide flat hill topped by a communications mast

North-West – a stunning view along Traigh na Beirigh towards the villages of Cnip and Bhalto; the svelte lines of water and sand are enhanced by two attractive rills where streams pour into the sea; the beach is backed by undulating dunes and the very green grass of a camp-site; the villages run up a hillside beyond, parallel to the coast; out to sea is an island, Siam Mor, plonked in the middle of the Caolas Phabaigh, the strait between the beach and the lovely islands of Phabaigh, big and little; at the southern end of big Phabaigh is a little jewel of a beach directly facing you; the whole scene is spell-binding with its elegant lines and contrasting terrain; Bhacasaigh lies to the south-east of Phabaigh completing the circle (Photo 378).

The walk along the ridge towards Seana Chnoc is delightful with this last view off to the left. Then you have to concentrate on the way down, which is not at all obvious. The best way I

could find was to the right by the little lochan, then briefly down its outflow before skirting right to avoid a precipice and steep sands; you emerge with another fabulous view along Traigh na Beirigh in front of you. Veer left across grass to a gate and a picnic area. From here, you can explore the machair before returning along the length of Traigh na Beirigh.



Photo 378: Traigh na Beirigh from Beinn na Bheirigh, Phabaigh to the right centre

#### 70: Headland north of Dun Borranais, Timsgearraidh, Lewis, Western Isles

A short distance from Reef, through the defile of Gleann Bhaltois, you come to Traigh Uige (or Uig Sands in English), an incredibly gorgeous expanse of sand, not really a beach, situated amidst glorious scenery. I had been here 13 years previously, when I had done a long 24k walk, now beyond me, from Mealasta round the coast to Loch Tamnabhaigh and back over Allt Bealach Raonasgail to Timsgearraidh. The views south into the wilderness around Loch Reasort were astounding but I had not explored good view-points around Traigh Uige as one of my two days was a wash-out. Now I intended to put that right on a leisurely wander around the area.

I started from what is called the shop in Timsgearraidh but is in fact a community centre, post office, tea and coffee bar, internet café, petrol station, recycling centre and supermarket, all run successfully by the local community. Turn right outside and take the first left towards the sands. At the right-hand bend, look for a small sign “footpath to the beach” to which you will return. First, continue round the corner and take the first turning left to the burial ground beyond Baille-na-Cille guest-house. From here there is the best view south across the sands

to the hills around Mealaisbhal, which features on many a publicity photo (Photo 1568). However, the all-round views are not as good as those from the spots to be described soon.



Photo 1568: the view from Baille-na-Cille (copyright: James Smith/Stirling Gallery, [www.jamesmithphotography.com](http://www.jamesmithphotography.com), [www.stirlinggallery.co.uk](http://www.stirlinggallery.co.uk))

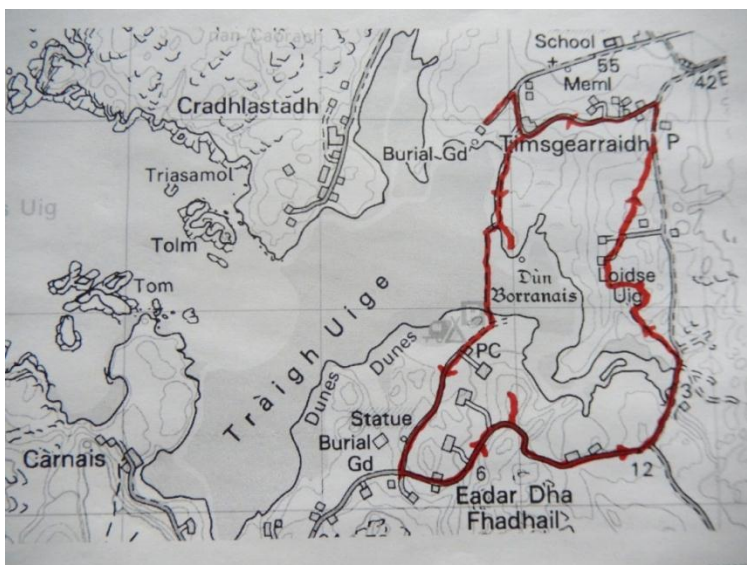


Photo 1167: Trail for spots 70, 71 and 72 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

Return to the footpath which skirts a field and avoids a private house. Four deer jumped the fence right in front of me and then stared at me as I passed. Following more signs, you come out on grassy land above the sands. Turn left rather than going down to the beach and stroll along southwards with wonderful views ahead and to your right. Hit your spot along this coast – mine had these views:



South – across a narrow neck of sand between you and the shore around Eadar Dha Fhadhail to the valley between Mealaisbhal and Tahabhal – this is the valley that leads over a pass to Loch Tamnabhaigh mentioned above; the hills are beautifully shaped and provide the perfect back-drop to the sands

South-West – over the full extent of Traigh Uige (2k) towards houses on the southern shore; you can see the swirls created by sand-banks and the incoming and outgoing tides; the outflow from Lochs Suaineabhal and Stacsabhat to the south-east curls all the way round the bay before emptying into Camas Uig (Uig Bay)

West – over more sands towards Camas Uig and its southern shore; Cradhlastadh Village guards the northern side of the entrance to Traigh Uige

North-West to North – yet more sands leading round to the small bay between you and Baille-na-Cille; the outflow mentioned above swirls attractively round the bay

North-East – over the green headland you have just crossed to the houses and pastures of Timsgearraidh and the mast on Forsnabhal that you saw from Beinn na Bheirigh (spot 69)

East – over an inlet of Traigh Uige, the imposing house of Loidse Uig commands the hillside

South-East – over the eastern end of Traigh Uige to the breast-like shape of Suaineabhal and the valley in which Lochs Stacsabhat and Suaineabhal hide, surrounded by lesser but still beautiful hills

This is the first of three all-round views of the area that I am recommending: they all reveal different aspects of this wonderful location. At this spot you feel yourself to be right amongst the sands with the much-photographed view over the sands towards the southern hills.

Continue to the end of the headland for a view of the remains of Dun Borranais and a walk through a teeming rabbit warren, then retrace your steps to a bridge over the outflow and down onto the sands. When I crossed, the water was a rich amber colour and the causeway onto the sands was covered in vivid green moss. Turn left to cross the sands to the campsite at Eadar Dha Fhadhail.

## 71: Sgal Beag, Eadar Dha Fhadhail, Lewis, Western Isles

A track and then a road take you through the campsite and round the bay anti-clockwise back to your starting-point at the shop (just over 4k). For the first 3k, this lovely road winds up and down through the houses of Eadar Dha Fhadhail (Ardroil in English). First you pass a wooden statue of the King piece of the Lewis Chessmen, a complete set of ancient chess pieces found in the dunes around here (Photo 394).



Photo 394: King of Lewis Chessmen

Then you come to a particularly lovely view of Ardroil 8 & 9, two houses on the left with a rocky outcrop behind them. At the entrance stands a boot, by way of welcome! Ardroil 10 & 11 are pretty good, too. Unfortunately there are no views of the sands or the bay until the top of the next rise, where you can turn left on a track by the right-bend sign. Find a rock for yourself at the top of the incline (the hillock is called Sgal Beag) and survey another perspective on the area, this time with a view out to sea and of Loch Stacsabhat:

West to North-West – over Ardroil 10 & 11 and the campsite, then over Traigh Uige and Camas Uig and past Glas Eilean to the sea; on the northern shore lies Cradhlastadh Village

North – over the inner part of Traigh Uige to Dun Borranais, Baille-na-Cille and Timsgearraidh, with Forsnabhal and its mast behind

North-East – over the marshy outflow from Loch Stacsabhat to Loidse Uig, with hills behind

East – unremarkable hills

South-East – over Loch Stacsabhat to Suaineabhal and the hills around Loch Suaineabhal

South – Tahabhal, Mealaisbhal and the valley between

South-West – the road you have just walked, leading past a burial ground towards Mangurstadh Village

From here you gain a better idea of the scenic hinterland behind Traigh Uige and can see westwards along the full length of the bay.

72: Totarol, by Loidse Uig, Lewis, Western Isles

Back at the road, follow it past the marshy outflow, itself quite beautiful, to a metal gate on the left. This starts a path towards Loidse Uig but you are going up the hill named Totarol to

your right, cutting off the path just before some steps. On the top you find a mass of pink rock from which to choose your spot. This was mine:

West – this is probably the best view down the whole length of Traigh Uige and Camas Uig to the sea: the swirls and curls of the sands, the headlands jutting into them, the waters further out, all create a beautiful vista, to which my photo does not do justice (Photo 398)

North-West – Loidse Uig, looking like a hotel but in fact a private house, sitting in a fantastic position at the eastern end of the sands; beyond, Baille-na-Cille and Cradhlastadh

North – Timsgearraidh is hidden but the school is just visible beneath Forsnabhal

East – unremarkable hills

South-East – Suaineabhal again with both Loch Stacsabhat and Loch Suaineabhal now visible, lying serenely beneath their surrounding hills, and a group of lumpy hillocks at the end of the valley (Photo 400)

South – over the beautifully-shaped marshy outflow towards Tahabhal and Mealaisbhal

South-West – over the exit of the outflow onto Traigh Uige to the campsite at Eadar Dha Fhadhail and the low hills beyond; you can see Sgal Beag (spot 71) by a green shed



Photo 398: from Totarol towards Camas Uig and the sea



Photo 400: from Totarol towards Lochs Stacsabhat and Suaineabhal

This was my favourite view of the three, revealing more of Camas Uig and more of the Suaineabhal Valley than the other two, with a more beautiful foreground of Loidse Uig and the marshy outflow into the bargain.

You can rejoin the path by descending towards the sands and go through a gate to Loidse Uig. Wander over to the next house and up the hill beyond for another spectacular view – how many can you take? Go through (or over) the gate to the east and head directly for the shop (as far as the boggy bits will allow). The fence is easy to cross near the far corner, otherwise there's a gate further down the slope. Enjoy a welcome tea/coffee/snack at the serve-yourself drinks café and check out the wonderful panoramic photos of Traigh Uige and Traigh na Beirigh on the walls.

#### Interlude: the Reinigeadal Trail, Harris, Western Isles

This is probably the best known trail in Harris and certainly the most exciting. However, no spot hit me hard enough to include in its own right. Instead, I'll give you a brief description of what is a very scenic walk. From Tarbert, it's 18k there and back on the map but more like 20k if you allow for the vagaries of the path. Or you can try and do a 27k circuit which takes you up north to Loch Maraig and back down Gleann Lacasdail. That was too much for me so I'll tell you about the out-and-back route.





Photo 1858: The road-walk from Tarbert is not shown (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

The first 3k is straightforward road-walking with a nice view up Glen Lacasdail past the two Lacasdail Lochs. The path to Reinigeadal is sign-posted just after the car-park. Now there is a 2k climb up the hillside to a pass between Beinn Tharsuinn and Trolamul. On the way up, there are views to the west towards Losgaintir and to the north-west towards the distinctive peak of An Cliseam. At the pass, the view out past a line of small islands to the Shiant Islands is something special. Then the path descends for another 1k before plunging down a steep escarpment called the Scriob in a series of zig-zags.

The last 2.5k from the bridge at the bottom of Gleann Trolamaraig to Reinigeadal is a delightful traverse of the hillsides at the head of Loch Trolamaraig, with good views to the coast and out to sea and passing through an evocative abandoned village at Gearraidh Lotaigear. There's a hostel at Reinigeadal if you want to break your journey but otherwise just a clutch of houses sheltered from the worst of the weather.



The return leg is actually easier than the outward one as the downward slopes (the real killers as you get older) are more gradual and the Sgriob is uphill. By the time you reach the road by Loch Lacasdail, you will be glad of a lift into Tarbert. I was lucky enough to catch a Scalpay bus whose driver told me he regularly picks up exhausted Reinigeadal hikers.

### 73: Losgaintir Dunes, Harris, Western Isles

This spot features because I missed the bus to Huisinis through a timetable change and had a morning to fill. So I took a bus to the Losgaintir turn and walked the 4k to Traigh Rosamol. Traigh Losgaintir is the largest expanse of sand in Lewis and Harris but its beauty lies not so much in its size as in its setting and its colours. When the tide comes in, its waters are shallow, opening the possibility of varying colours from dark blue in the depths to light turquoise in the shallows. When the tide is out, curling sand bars are left behind – you can see all this as you walk along the road, with the island of Taransay a short way out to sea. Passing through the village of Losgaintir, you see a pretty lochan on your right and climb a short rise to catch your first view of the massive dunes behind Traigh Rosamol.

Stay with the road until it ends at a car-park, where you have the choice between going down to the beach or up onto the dunes. I didn't have time to do both so chose the dunes, expecting better views and more interesting walking up there. There's a fairly obvious ridge that takes you round many of the dunes and it's really just a case of "choose your dune" for a fabulous view all around – mine was like this:

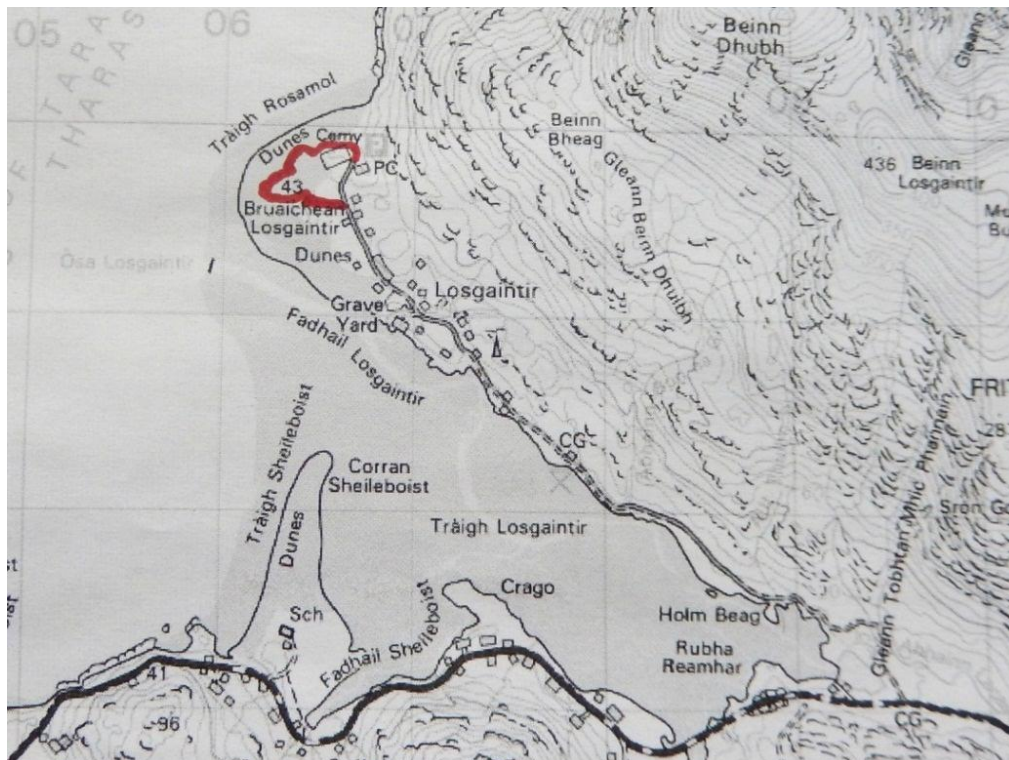


Photo 1465: Trail for spot 73 - the Losgaintir turn is in the bottom right corner (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

South-East – the coast road back to Tarbert runs along the northern shore of Traigh Losgaintir; the main road south winds along its southern shore

East – an enormous hole in the dunes, maybe 30m deep and 50m across, intervenes between you and the houses of Losgaintir Village with Beinn Losgaintir behind (everything is Losgaintir round here)

North-East – along the ridge of dunes and across Loch a Siar to the mountains of North Harris

North – the north end of Traigh Rosamol is hiding behind the dunes but you can see over the waters to the North Harris coastline retreating north-westwards towards Huisinis (see spot 74)

North-West – over the Sound of Taransay to the shallow pyramid of Taransay Island with its two tiny beaches

West – past the southern tip of Taransay to the open sea

South-West – along the Sound of Taransay and the South Harris coast to the Ceapabhal Peninsula and the western end of Traigh Scarasta

South – the ever-changing waters around the sand-bar that protrudes from Traigh Sheileboist towards Losgaintir; this is where the most beautiful aquamarines and turquoises and patterns in the sand appear as the tide ebbs and flows; behind are the low hills of South Harris



Photo 1892: Losgaintir from Sheilebost – you can see the large dunes beneath the peak of the central hill (copyright Douglas Corrance/Stirling Gallery, [www.stirlinggallery.co.uk](http://www.stirlinggallery.co.uk))

In fact, you are surrounded on three sides by beautiful waters and swirls of sand, much to the delight of the many photographers that have captured their moods. Backing them, hills of various sizes and at various distances add contrasting shapes and colours. You have to retrace your steps to the Losgaintir turn but that's no hardship amongst such marvellous scenery.

#### 74: Huisinis, Harris, Western Isles

Having missed the bus and completed my exploration of Losgaintir, I realised I could hitch my way to Huisinis as I knew from a previous visit how special it is and this was my last day in the Western Isles. I made it in four lifts and three hours from the Losgaintir turn which left me only two hours to explore before the last bus back to Tarbert. This meant that I didn't have time to go round the coastal path to Loch Crabhadail and up Huiseabhal Beag as originally intended. I had predicted finding at least two spots, one on the hillock to the north of Loch na Cleabhaig and one somewhere near the top of Huiseabhal Beag. Instead, I crossed the machair to the jetty on Caolas an Scarp and turned left.

Continue by the shore until the going starts to become difficult and then head south up the cnoc nearest to Huisinis (not the higher one out towards Rubha Huisinis) (Photo 1570). I was accompanied by seven Highland Cattle who seemed to favour the grass on the top of the cnoc and watched me at close quarters as I scribbled my notes:



Photo 1173: The dotted red line indicates the trail I did not have time to follow (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)



North – over Caolas an Scarp (Straits of Scarp) to the eastern shore of the island of Scarp where the few remaining houses line the straits; beyond Scarp lies the open expanse of Braigh Mor Bay and the western shore of Uig with its many islands; the Uig Hills, seen previously from spots 70-72, rise slightly to the east

North-East – the eastern side of Caolas an Scarp curves round to Traigh Mheilein with the wilderness area by Lochs Tealasbhaigh and Resort in the distance (no roads, no paths); the path I mentioned to Loch Crabadail can be seen rising up the steep side of Huiseabhal Beag

East – over the Huisinis machair and beach to the slopes of Huiseabhal Beag; a few houses nestle in the lee of the cnoc

South-East – across Bagh Huisinis to a tiny beach; the road to Tarbert hugs the eastern edge of the bay then climbs into the foothills of Northern Harris

South – Taransay in the middle distance with a little beach between its large and small ends; to its right Ceapabhal appears, with Pabbay and the hills of North Uist in the far distance

South-West – the larger cnoc out towards Rubha Huisinis

West – a small islet and the open sea

North-West – the main body of Scarp



Photo 1570: Huisinis Beach with cnoc in background (copyright: Duncan McEwan/Stirling Gallery, [www.stirlinggallery.co.uk](http://www.stirlinggallery.co.uk))



All around you are the lush, not quite machair, grasses on which the cattle were feasting, sprinkled with lots of little yellow, blue and pink flowers. The views combine the nearby machair and beaches with the distant vistas north to Uig and south to the west coast of South Harris and North Uist. If you come this way, try to spend the whole day here to include the walk to Loch Crabhadail and up Huisieabhal Beag. I can vouch for the former, having done it on a previous visit, but the latter is just an idea and I don't know if there is a feasible way up from this direction. You can return to Huisinis Beach by descending direct.

#### 75: Ben Volovaig, Trotternish, Skye

Please do the ferry crossing from Tarbert to Uig (the one in Skye). There is something to look at the whole way; first it is Loch an Tairbeairt with its many islets, then the Shiant Islands and the coast of Harris. By the time these start to fade, the coast of Skye is coming into focus with some unusual shapes to see: namely, the islets off the north point of Trotternish and Trotternish itself with its apron of flat fertile land surrounding the mountain ridge that forms its spine. Over to the south-west, the sheer cliff of Dunvegan Head appears, then disappears, behind Waternish Point.

From Uig, take the long road to Portree via Duntulm, Staffin and the Old Man of Storr, even if you are travelling by bus (buses go both ways around Trotternish). The scenery is quite devastating: I would pick out the area around Duntulm, the Quiraing to the west of Staffin and the area around the Storr, in particular. Take the time to visit the Quiraing (you have to walk the last bit) for the most unusual – and beautiful – rock formations you will ever see. Why isn't it a World Heritage Site? The whole way round Trotternish you have the jagged spine of mountains to your right, while to your left, from Duntulm onwards, views of Wester Ross, Torridon, Applecross and Raasay across the Minch.

I didn't stop off this time as I had walked most of this on a previous visit but I did notice a likely spot from the bus: this is Ben Volovaig, right at the northern tip of Trotternish. I know it's cheating because I didn't go there but I can tell that from there you could see most, if not all, of all these views:

South-West – over a green plain to Duntulm, Cnoc Roll, the little hill behind it, Lub Score Bay, Loch Snizort and Waternish Point

West – over Lub a'Sgiathain Bay to Meall Tuath and Rubha Hunish, which form the other prong of the tip of Trotternish; in the distance, the hills of North Uist

North-West – over the many islets just off the coast to the mountains of Harris

North – over a tiny bay and Rubha na h-Aiseig to Eilean Trodday; beyond, the Shiant Islands and the dim coast of Lewis



Photo 1174: Map of area around Ben Volovaig (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

North-East – over the Minch to the north-west coast of Scotland, the peninsula north of Gairloch and Poolewe seen clearly, the rest only vaguely

East – over the Minch to Gair Loch, backed by the mountains of Letterewe

South-East – along the east coast of Trotternish with its several islands to Rona, Applecross and the mountains of Torridon

South – across Port Gobhlaig to the villages of northern Trotternish and the ring road with a foretaste of the Quiraing in the jagged edges of Meall na Suiramach

Ben Volovaig itself seems to be a green spot upon which it would be a pleasure to sit, surrounded near and far by green pastures, blue seas and the intriguing shapes of islands and mountains. I wish I could have got off the bus and gone to see for myself (this was the last bus to my b&b) but I am certain the Ben is crowned with a spectacular spot. The accompanying trail would be from Duntulm to Rubha Hunish (which I have done and can vouch for), along Lub a'Sgiathain Bay to Rubha na h-Aiseig, then up the Ben and down to Balmacqueen Village, about 10k altogether.

#### 76: Shielings, Upper Glen Dale, Duirinish, Skye

As I said, I had been to Skye before and had remembered two areas in particular: Glen Sligachan, the most beautiful route into the Cuillins, and Glen Dale, a less well-known area in the centre of the Duirinish Peninsula that I had only driven past on the way to Waterstein and Neist Point. So I wanted to explore Glen Dale properly. I had planned to go up at least one of Macleod's Tables, the two flat-topped mountains that dominate the peninsula (Photo 427), but soon gave up that idea when advised how difficult the going is from the direction of Glen Dale, where I was staying. Instead, I went up the valley to see what I could find. I chose a path which goes up from the road end at Fasach and then turns left towards Skinidin.

Starting from the village shop, take the first right on the road to Dunvegan and walk past the houses of Lower Fasach for 2k. After the road turns into gravel, look out for a grass track going straight ahead where the road turns left uphill. The grassy track runs by the River



Photo 427: the two Macleod's Tables from the Holmisdale road

Hamara trilling and muttering to the right. Any wet bits on the track can easily be avoided by a brief foray into the heather. In about 1k you reach an old blackhouse, looking picturesque with shrubs, ferns and heather growing on and around its ruined walls.

Here the track forks left but there's a nice detour on a path forking right to some mini-rapids (very mini). At this point, the path peters out and it's easier to return to the blackhouse than to try and do what I did and attempt a 'short-cut' over to the track. Another ten minutes brings you to some surprising green mounds – I counted ten – at an idyllic spot by a stream that flows down towards the river. These are the remains of shielings (shelters for people looking after animals at summer pasture). From one of the shielings, you can survey these views:

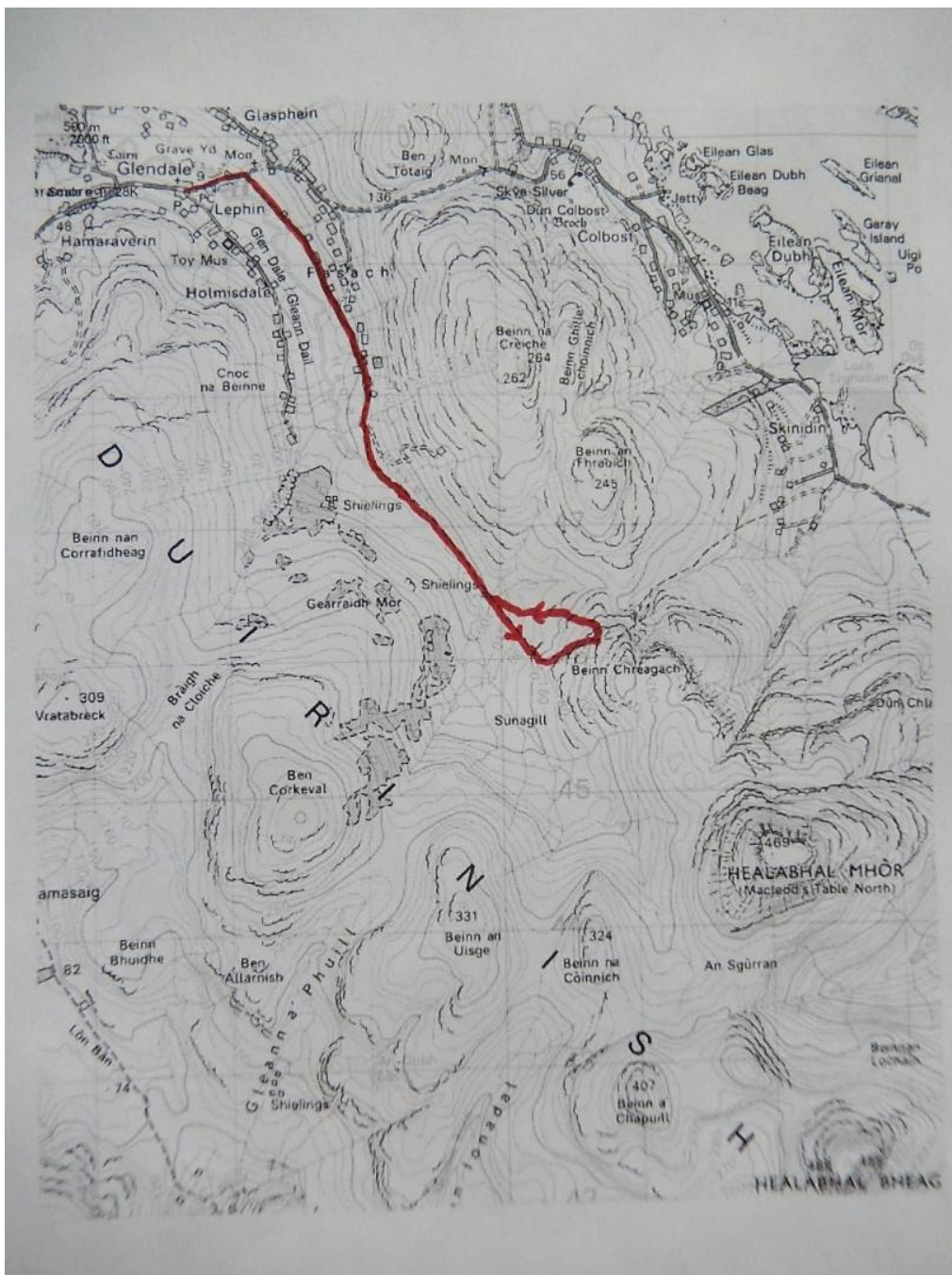


Photo 1182: Trail for spot 76 (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)



South-West – a tiny waterfall on the main river about 200m away with a small ravine beyond that leads over towards the abandoned village of Lorgill

South – the Upper Glen Dale watershed (the River Hamara splits into several tributaries) with a couple of lesser Beinnns behind

South-East – the rest of Upper Glen Dale leading up to Macleod's Tables – the nearer one is wider but lower and seen over the top of Beinn Chreagach, the farther one is out of sight

East – the pass leading over to Skinidin

North-East and North – a couple more Beinnns on the east side of Glen Dale

North-West – back down the valley to the last few houses on the west side of Glen Dale (Holmisdale) with a red roof conspicuous; in the far distance, two mountains on North Uist

West – a non-descript hill of heather

The charm of this spot lies in the shieling area – a feeling of peace and tranquillity, a few birds and the odd butterfly, grasses and mosses on the collapsed shielings sprinkled with tiny yellow, white and pink flowers and lots of daisies; a stream runs right past the shielings to the river about 50m away and the surrounding hills enclose the silence in seven directions.

The silence was interrupted by a cuckoo: I then realised that every spot I had visited in NW Scotland except Sandwood Bay had been accompanied by the inevitable cuckoo, even when there seemed to be no suitable habitat about. They certainly get around, those cuckoos. Another observation: stopping at these shielings was the first time I had to use midge-repellent on this whole trip – NW Scotland is not as midge-infested as rumour has it.

I then set off towards Beinn Chreagach, hoping to find a good view from the path as it crosses the Beinn on its way to Skinidin. However, the path beyond the shielings is not at all clear: in fact, it goes over a couple of small streams and then up and along a small hillock. The further you go, the more the track or path peters out until the way over Beinn Chreagach is indistinguishable and the going becomes difficult. What's more, the views aren't that great, although you do get to see the other Macleod's Table – this one is narrower but slightly higher. Climbing the nearer Macleod's Table from here would involve a really hard trudge through 2k of heather and up its very steep western side – not something I would contemplate, though I'm sure the views would be far and wide over Skye and its surrounding islands. So I cut my losses and cut back through the heather to the track and back to the shielings. As you retrace your steps to Fasach, look out for more shielings on the hill to the west, now you know what shielings look like. It would be convenient to cross to the west side of Glen Dale but there's no easy way over the river so you have to follow the road back to Glendale Village.

## 77: Sron Ailach, Duirinish, Skye

Still looking for a good vantage point from which to survey the best of the Glendale area, I asked some locals who suggested Scoval, a hill to the north where there are two communications masts at the end of a paved road. However, that option didn't seem very inviting. Instead, I decided to explore the ridge above the west side of Glen Dale, figuring from my map that there would be a good spot somewhere up there. Setting out from the Glendale shop once more, I walked the 2k up Holmisdale to the red roof I had seen from the shielings, which turned out to be a restaurant. After lunch there, I looked for a way up onto the ridge and soon found one.



Photo 1183: Trail for spot 77 and the surrounding area (Crown copyright 2015, Ordnance Survey FL-GV 166842)

Just to the north of the red roof, there is a gate into a field where another gate can be seen on its far side leading onto the hillside. Go through these and work your way round to the right and up onto the ridge. There are no proper paths but the going is quite easy, on short soft heather. Try to hit a spot towards the northern end of the ridge, which goes by the name of Sron Ailach (Photo 1571), with the following views:



Photo 1571: spot 77 is roughly where the rainbow meets the darker ridge (photo: Rowena Mackinnon)

North-West – my eye was first drawn to the view down shimmering Loch Pooltiel towards the North Uist hills and the Sound of Harris

North – the eastern shore of Loch Pooltiel ends in the dramatic sheer 313m cliff of Biod an Athair; on its landward side, the green slope rises up to the top of the cliff like the take-off ramp of an aircraft-carrier; in the distance, the mountains of Harris

North-East – the houses of Feriniquarrie and Glasphein spread out at the foot of Scoval with its masts; Glendale Village cannot be seen but you can see the church and monument at its eastern end

East – over the first houses of Fasach to the road over to Dunvegan between Ben Totaig and Beinn na Creiche; through that gap you can glimpse the Trotternish Ridge in the far distance

South-East – the two Macleod's Tables appear almost in line with Beinn a'Chapuill to the west; peeking over the ridge to the east are two of the Cuillins

South – the ridge you have just traversed

South-West – Waterstein Head also rises to 300m like the ramp of an aircraft-carrier; to its west over the Minch lies the flat expanse of South Uist

West – a pretty view over the houses of Borrodale and Milovaig to the headland of An Ceannaich and so back to Loch Pooltiel

This view catches the whole lay-out of the beautiful Glen Dale area with its houses, white in the sun, strung out like a row of pearls to the east and the houses of Milovaig spread-eagled on the hillside above Loch Pooltiel to the west.

You can choose your way down – several directions are possible. I made for a dark path I had noticed earlier heading in the direction of the church and monument. This turned out to be somewhat boggy but did the job of returning me to an ice-cream at the shop. On the way, I was given permission to pass through the grounds of No.3 Lephin, which is the home of ‘Hebridean Alpacas’ – I counted ten of various hues. The farmer asked me not to disturb them, so I skirted around them. If you go this way, watch out for two large Alsations who may put you right if you put a foot wrong. There must be a way round this property but I didn’t have to look for it.

I had intended to try another spot on Skye that promised a panoramic view of North Skye and of the Cuillins without having to climb a Cuillin. This is Am Mam, a 407m hill just to the north of Bealach a’Mhaim, the pass between the Sligachan Hotel and Glen Brittle. However, I didn’t even set out as the clouds came down and the path up the Allt Deara Mor Valley didn’t look interesting enough from the bus without the prospect of a view. So I spent a lazy day in the b&b reading Highland walking books instead. As with Ben Volovaig (spot 75), I’m certain this would be a great spot but can’t attempt to describe the views because I didn’t get near enough and the clouds were in the way.

So that was the end of my trip to the North-West, a vastly under-rated part of Scotland that is often by-passed or ignored in favour of better-known destinations like the Trossachs, Loch Ness, Glen Coe and two hundred and eighty two Munros.