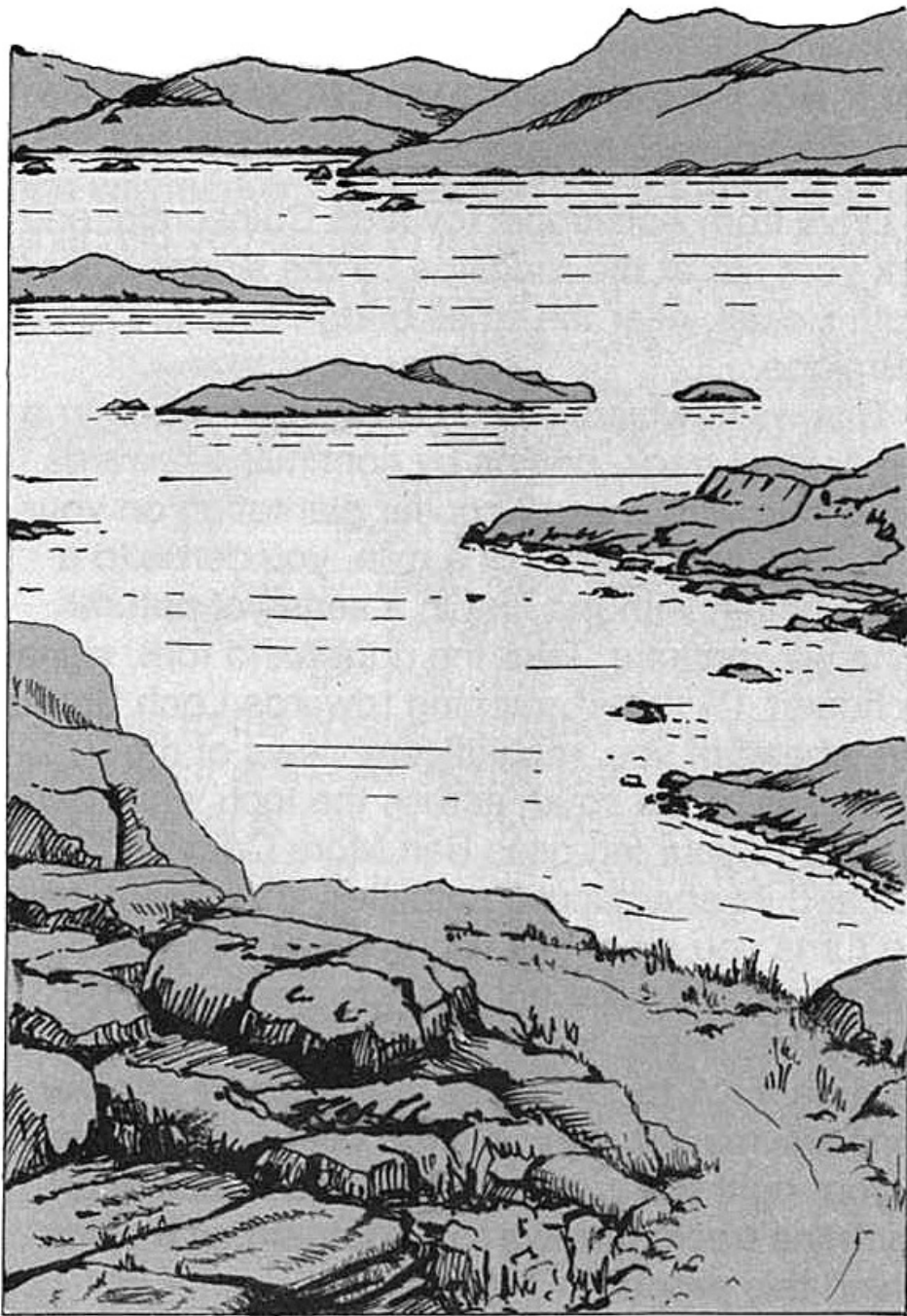


WALKING AROUND ACHILTIBUIE



Seven Walks in Coigach
www.coigach.com

COIGACH WALKS

GENERAL INFORMATION

With its variety of scenery – from quiet pastures to sea cliffs to spectacular hills – Coigach is a walker's paradise, but there are certain "rules" which you are strongly requested to abide by.

These are:-

- ✓ Take personal responsibility for your own actions and act safely.
- ✓ Respect people's privacy and peace of mind.
- ✓ Care for your environment and take your litter home.
- ✓ Keep your dog under proper control.
- ✓ Please park your car in the areas indicated, and do not obstruct passing places.
- ✓ Take care not to damage walls and fences – they are important for controlling stock and leave all gates as you find them.

In addition, for your own comfort and protection, we would strongly advise you to take adequate clothing and footwear, since the finest weather can deteriorate rapidly here, and there are rough or muddy patches on all the walks listed. In the case of Walks 6 and 7, which are strenuous mountain rambles, please whenever possible ensure that someone in the village knows where you are going, and be sure to take with you an appropriate Ordnance Survey map, a compass, mobile phone and a torch as well as some food and warm clothing at the very least.

FOLLOW THE SCOTTISH OUTDOOR ACCESS CODE

**From an original text by
HENRY BOYD-CARPENTER**

**Produced by
ACHILTIBUIE TOURIST ASSOCIATION
www.coigach.com**

This document has been downloaded from our website. Purchasing a printed copy locally will help to support this and other projects.

To increase your enjoyment of these and other local walks you may like to take a copy of The Coigach Geotrail leaflet with you and discover the story of the landscape of Coigach and its journey across the planet over the last 3 billion years. This printed leaflet is also available locally.

7 WALKS IN COIGACH

Published by Achiltibuie Tourist Association

WALK No. 1: ACHDUART AND CULNACRAIG : Easy: 1¾ hours. 5 miles

Drive from Achiltibuie towards Culnacraig, and park your car at the roadside by the signpost for the Youth Hostel, near the small bridge over the Allt Ach a' Braighe. This walk, which is entirely on quiet roads or a well defined track, begins by continuing towards Culnacraig with a small conifer plantation on your right, until, in a quarter of a mile, you come to a road junction with the first in a series of natural stone waymarkers. Take the right hand fork, signed "Achduart 1¼ miles", dipping towards Loch Broom, with, ahead of you, magnificent views of the mountains to the south across the loch while behind you and to your left rises Ben More Coigach (2419 feet) and its spectacular satellites.

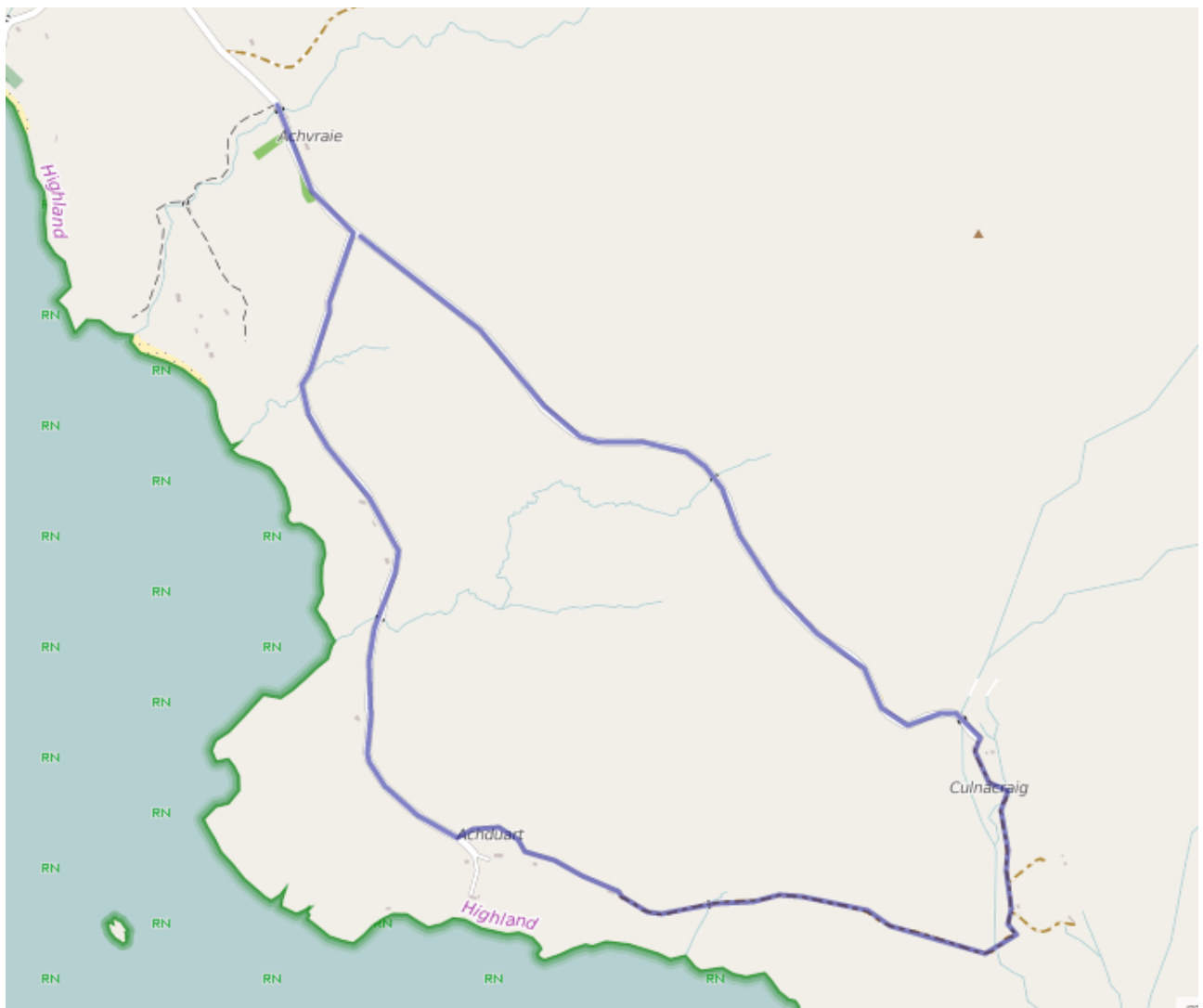
After many twists and turns you reach the road-end at Achduart, from which a shorter and rougher variant of the walk starts. Here, leave the tarred road and take the wide track to the left as indicated by another stone waymarker. After a short distance you pass on your right the entrance gate to a house after which the track narrows to a footpath as it skirts behind this property. The well defined path changes to a grassy track for a short distance as you skirt behind another small cottage and then you pick up the track again as you continue out on to the hill once more, with exciting glimpses of the southern buttresses of Ben More and the great razor-back ridge of Garbh Choireachan ("the Cauldron") which falls steeply to Loch Broom.

The telegraph wires join the path, and soon, crossing the hump which separates Achduart from Culnacraig, you begin your descent to the latter which is still hidden by the shoulder of the hill. Straight ahead lie Isle Martin and the entrance to Camas Mor and Ardmair Bay anchorage. As the slope levels you come to a footbridge over the Allt a Coire Reidh beyond which you bear left diagonally uphill to join the signposted track, coming in from your right, which runs from Blughasary near Strathcanaird, a further 8 miles away along the crags overlooking the loch.

This track along "the Rock" is an adventurous scramble, only for the steady-headed, but well worth tackling, at least in its early stages. Remember that in the 19th century the Achiltibuie postman used this route to reach the village!

For this walk, however, you bear left (at the stone waymarker) and as you reach the houses of Culnacraig you come to a gateway, beyond which a track winds through the crofts to the bridge over the Allt a Coire Reidh flowing down from the saddle between Ben More and Sgurr an Fhidleir ("the Fiddler's Peak"). Here there is a small car park. Now follow the road which winds up to nearly 450 feet, and then drops gradually for 2 miles to the conifer plantation and your starting point at the Allt Ach a' Braighe.

There are glorious views of the Summer Isles at the mouth of Loch Broom, and, to the right of Cona Mheall (1786 feet – "The Hill of Enchantment") with the sharp tooth of the Acheninver Pinnacle. If, however, you have shortened (and toughened) the walk by leaving your car at Achduart, you should leave the road at its highest point and make your way due west over Meall Dubh Ard.



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WALK NO. 2: FOX POINT AND RED HILL: First section generally easy, but rough and steep on the hill. 1½ hours. 3 miles

Drive from Achiltibuie past Bardentarbat Beach and through Polbain. In a mile you will see a turning signposted to Old Dornie Harbour. Take this, and park your car at the end of the road near the second jetty.

Walk up the steep bank beyond the road end and you will find a path through the heather following the ridge above the shore. The channel on your right is the Caolas Eilean Ristol, which provides a sheltered anchorage for those boats too big to enter Old Dornie's little harbour. Across the water is Isle Ristol, and ahead of you cluster the Summer Isles at the mouth of Loch Broom, while on your left are the western crags of Meall Dearg, the Red Hill.

As you approach a little headland you will see that the ground is corrugated (and wet). These corrugations are the site of "lazy beds", where, in years gone by, crops were cultivated with a mulch of seaweed on the ridges. You will see the lines of such beds across the water on Isle Ristol and elsewhere in Coigach, but nowhere more clearly than here.

After exploring the headland continue along the shore round a little bay with a boulder beach and follow the narrow and muddy path up the cliff beyond to join a broad terrace between the crags and the sea. The views of the mountains to the south open up and will dominate the remainder of the outward part of the walk.

As the terrace ends you will see that the path bears left towards the cliff top over a succession of rocky slabs. Take care here as the going can be very slippery, and if your nerve is in doubt, retrace your steps a hundred yards or so and scramble up the hillside, joining the path as it reaches the cliff top. From here the route is fairly level and your objective - Fox Point (Rubh' a' Mhada Idh-Rualdh) with its ruined cottage - can be seen clearly with tier upon tier of the West Coast mountains, An Teallach ahead and the Torridons in the distance to the south. Crossing two small burns you reach the bay of Mol Mor and the route is now level all the way to the headland. A better place for a picnic, or to laze away a sunny afternoon could not be imagined.

From Fox Point either retrace your steps, or, preferably make your way eastwards until you see ahead of you the fence beyond which are the houses of Dornie. At this point you can either follow the waymarked path along the shore to its conclusion just beyond the lowest house and return to the harbour by way of the road, or cut left up the slopes of Meall Dearg. It is hard to determine which of the many cairns marks the summit. Visit as many of them as you can, making sure in particular not to miss those to the west overlooking Caolas Eilean Ristol. Follow the broad ridge as it swings north-east with the northern mountains spread before you, and, when you reach the end, either head down the heathery slopes to the cross-roads between Loch a'Mheallais and Loch Camas an Feidh, and follow the road back to the harbour and your car, or scramble down the steep and boulder strewn slopes aiming direct for the harbour mouth (but beware of the crags which abound on this face of the hill).



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WALK No. 3: REIFF AND RUBHA COIGACH: Easy: 1 hour. 1¼ miles or: 3 hours. 6 miles

Drive from Achiltibuie through Polbain and Altandhu and take the Coast road to Reiff. Parking is limited here at the road end – do not block private roads but be prepared to park in a gravel pit at some distance from the houses and start your walk from this point.

Reiff itself commands magnificent views to the south and west, and on a clear day you can see the mountains of Harris, with Clisham dominant, across the Minch, while further south the Shianta and the northern peninsula of Skye are bunched on the horizon.

At the very end of the road a bridge leads you on to “the Island” not strictly such, but the area between the shallow Loch of Reiff and the sea. At its southern tip the Island shelves relatively gently down to the bay but at the north lie some of the most spectacular cliffs in Coigach (particularly so when heavy seas are breaking on them).

Make your way round the seaward edge of the Island making sure you keep to the shoreline, and, just short of the point of Roinn a’ Mhill, you will skirt a huge chasm. Keep to the north of the lochan (often dry in summer) and join the track which hugs the eastern shore of the Loch of Reiff. To complete the short walk, turn right and return to Reiff, the houses of which can be seen clearly from the head of the loch.

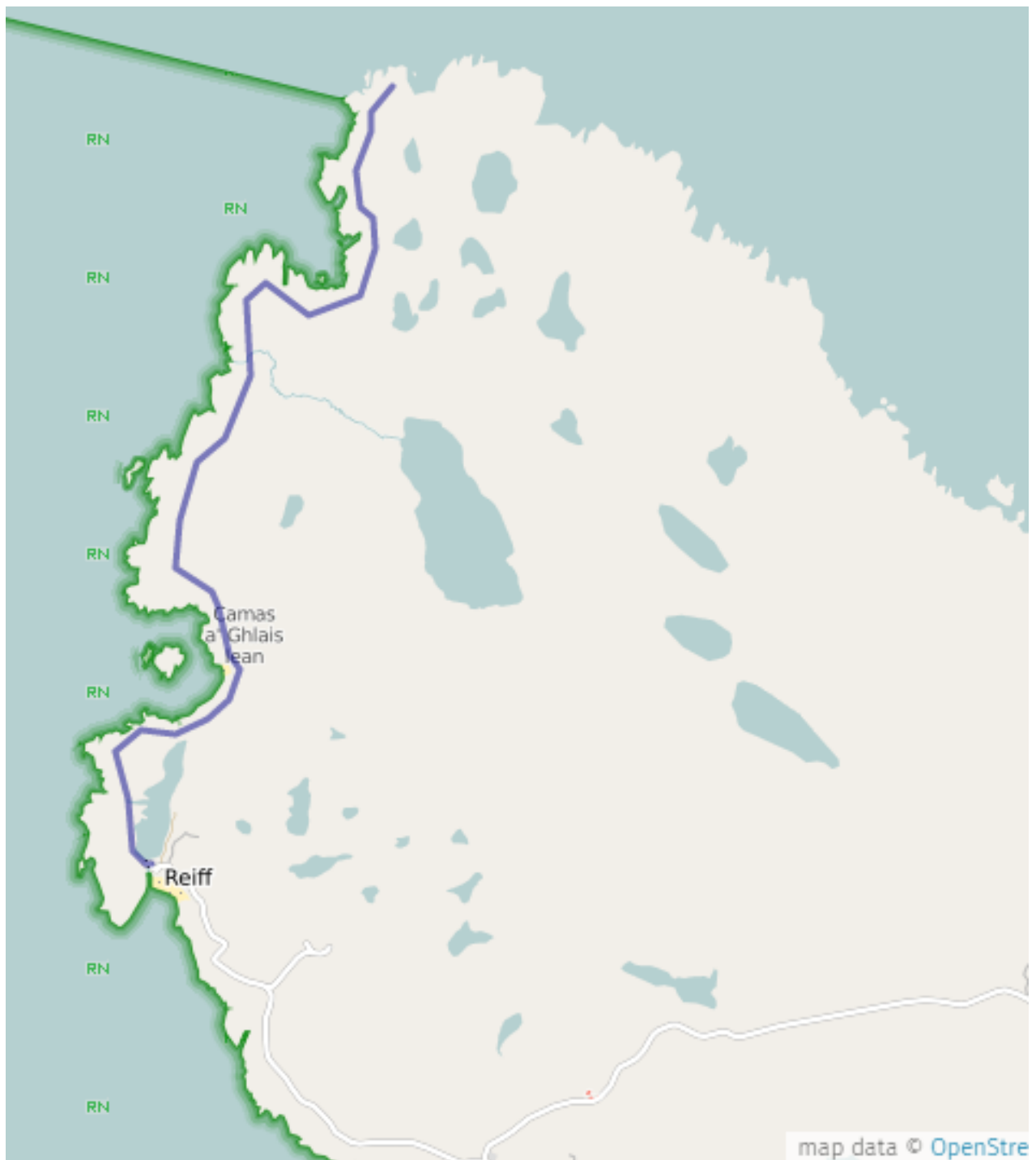
But, if you have sufficient time and energy bear left over the top of the stony beach above the bay of Camas Eilean Ghlais with its craggy island – a sea bird paradise. The track continues round the bay, never far from the shore (and a succession of little beaches and picnic places). A few hundred yards inland you will see a cottage nestling in a fold of the hills, and beyond it a shallow glen runs up to Lochan an Rathaid and the marshy interior of the Rubha Mor peninsula.

Climb the shoulder of the cliff at the northern extremity of the bay, and you will reach an undulating plateau which stretches ahead of you. You are now half way to Rubha Coigach, and for the next mile or so the scenery is less dramatic but still beautiful in its wildness and desolation. The route, now almost pathless, takes you to the point of Rubha Min from which you skirt the second large inlet on this coast – Faochag Bay – at the far side of which is the narrow fjord of Faochag Vik. Thereafter a succession of small lochans mark the way toward the point itself. By this time the spectacular qualities of the first mile of the walk have returned in full measure, massive tables of rock plunging to the sea, and the wilderness of the Rubha Mor stretching away behind and to your right.

Explore the cliff tops, and then return by the route you came, allowing yourself plenty of time to visit the lochs near the headland, and perhaps using a short-cut from the southern side of Faochag Bay to Lochan an Rathaid, taking care to avoid the crags and the bogs.

From the Lochan regain Camas Eilean Ghlais by following the glen down to the cottage at its foot before joining the homeward path round the Camas and then along the eastern shore of the Loch of Reiff back to your car.

This walk can be extended by following the cliffs from Rubha Coigach along the eastern side of the Rubha Mor peninsula. But the going is heavy, and often very wet, though there is ample compensation in the magnificent views across Enard Bay to the northern mountains dominated by Suilven, Quinag and Foinaven. Moreover, unless you can organise a car to pick you up at Achnahaird Beach Car Park, the tramp back along the road to Reiff is rather a long and wearisome one at the end of the day!



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7 WALKS IN COIGACH

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WALK No. 4: THE PEAT ROAD

Easy with rough alternatives. 2 hours, 4 hours or 2½ hours 4,7 or 5 miles

Leave your car on the green by Badentarbat Beach and follow the road uphill towards Polbain, leaving the Pier below you to the left. This is a long pull up, but rewarding for its views of the Summer Isles across Badentarbat Bay and the further prospect of the mountains of the south. Shortly before the slope levels off you will see a tarred road coming in from the right. Turn up this, passing a cottage surrounded by trees on your right, beyond which the surface of the track deteriorates.

This is the old Peat Road leading to the working in the hollow below Meall an Fheadain (“the Hill of the Fairies”) and Meall na Beiste (“Fox Hill”). The ascent is gradual, and makes a good afternoon stroll for a winter’s as well as a summer’s day, but for the active and adventurous the walk can be made more challenging by choosing an alternative route back rather than retracing your outward journey.

In good, clear weather you can make a delightful round by cutting south-west before the Peat Road fades out and following the marker posts towards the craggy outcrops at the southern end of Lochan Dubh (“the Dark Lochan”). The going is fairly rough and wet until you reach the rocks. To your west now above Polbain is Castle Crag, Meall a’ Chaisteil (587 feet), with a huge rock table on its northern flank.

After visiting the summit, cross the saddle beyond the rock table and scramble up the slope opposite – not as steep as it looks from Castle Crag! – to the ridge of the small range which forms the northern Coigach skyline as seen from Achiltibuie itself. This is Meall an Fheadain (667 feet), well equipped with a trig point and sturdy cairn. As the highest point on the relatively low-lying peninsula the views all round are magnificent, not least of the Outer Hebrides stretching along the western horizon.

At the end of the short ridge, a sketchy path leads you down to a communications mast and the end of a minor road which winds up from Altandhu. Follow the road down to the village (perhaps leaving it briefly to climb on to Meall na Beiste at the end of the range if you are still feeling energetic) where you turn left and keep straight on back past Loch Camas an Fheidh and Loch a’ Mheallain, over the hill to Polbain, and down to your car at Badentarbat Beach.

In less good weather, or if you have less time available, turn east (to your right) at the end of the Peat Road and follow a burn as it drops down towards Loch Vatachan. The going is fairly rough but straightforward. Two-thirds of the way down there are small waterfalls. At the loch edge turn right and follow the shore until it curves away to the north from which point you should cross the moorland to the road which leads you back to the crossroads between Achiltibuie and Badentarbat Beach. Fork right here and you will soon be back at your car.

For two other variations of this route you may either follow the wall which you see to your left from one of the marker posts to the south of Lochan Dubh and descend to the east end of Polbain and the start of the Peat Road, or follow the marker posts over the saddle all the way to the west end of Polbain, turning left along the road and through the village towards Badentarbat.



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WALK No. 5: ENARD BAY: Fairly easy: 3 ½ hours: 6 miles

From Achiltibuie drive along the road towards Ullapool past Loch Bhatachan and Loch Raa until you come to the road junction between the seaward-end of Loch Raa and the salt flats at the head of Achnahaird Bay.

Park your car in the large layby beside the postbox and tourist information cairn and then walk a few yards along the Achnahaird road, passing a small fenced field on your right, and go through the small gate on the right of the burn. Keeping to the right of the burn, follow the bank of the stream towards the sea.

The walking – over well-cropped turf interspersed with stoney patches – is level and easy, and this early section of the suggested route makes an ideal saunter at any time of the year, though best of all in the summer months when the sea pinks are in bloom. The walk follows the shore all the way round the peninsula which divides Achnahaird Bay from Garvie Bay, both small indentations in the wide expanse of Enard Bay which stretches from – Coigach to Lochinver and to Stoer (with its white lighthouse on the point). There is little by way of a track until you head away from the sea again at Loch Garvie, and weather conditions and personal inclination will dictate the detail of your route. As you approach the sea, with Achnahaird Beach across the river, the Allt Loch Raa, you will find sheep tracks to guide you up the low crags which precede the cliffs. The going is fairly rough but not at all difficult.

At this point you come to a deer fence protecting a tree plantation – a stile is provided to enable you to cross this. Soon the little cove of Camas a' Bhualte opens up with the hill, Cnoc Mor an Rubha Bhig rising behind and beyond. At the far side of the cove the path follows a narrow terrace above the water, where some care is needed when the ground is wet, but from the mouth all is easier again, and the cliff tops can be followed fairly closely to the point of Rubha Beag where reefs run far out to sea.

There are ideal picnic spots here, and a wealth of sea-bird life to watch. Now make your way eastwards. The cove on your left is Camas a' Bhothain, and its island Sgeir Bhuidhe. Two deep inlets have to be rounded, the first with its westward shore deeply undercut by the sea, and the layers of strata well defined, while the second is a beautiful little natural harbour with a ruined stone cottage at its head – again a perfect picnic spot.

Beyond, the short turf gradually gives way to more tussocky grass for a while, and there is a hazardous and precipitous section along the face of the hillside (which can easily be avoided by a detour over the top). The long, low headland closing in the eastern side of Camas a' Bhothain is Rubh' a' Choin, its rock slab split by straight channels. It is well worth following the shingle isthmus on the point.

Now scramble over the boulders at the foot of the cliffs, and climb upwards again to follow the shoulder of Creag a' Choin Mhoir, again crossing the deer fence by means of the stile provided, and which, in half a mile, drops to sea-level at Garvie Bay. In another half mile you reach the white sandy beach, beyond which the Garvie river tumbles into the sea. From here follow the river up to Loch Garvie, with its rushes and water-lilies, and go on along its shore negotiating a stream (Allt Luchaidh).

Invariably the route from here back to the road is wet but quite straightforward. The upper reaches of the river above the loch are spectacular, and, when the gorse is in bloom, there is ample compensation in sight and scent for the occasional scratch. Ahead of you is the bridge across the river as it debouches from Loch Oscaig. Turn right along the road and follow it back the two miles to your car – quite a pleasant finish to the walk despite the tarmac. Beyond Loch Oscaig you will see Dubh Lochan, Loch a' Chaoruinn, and then the sands of Achnahaird on your right before the road dips down to the car park at the head of Loch Raa.



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7 WALKS IN COIGACH

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WALK No. 6: THE DUBHRACH CHOIRE ROUND - Rough: 5-6 hours 7 miles

This is a tough mountain ramble which should only be tackled in good weather and if you have plenty of time. However it is very worth while, and will give you an unrivalled opportunity to savour the individual character and landscape of the Coigach hills.

From Achiltibuie drive south-east (as for the start of Walk 1) and park your car at the roadside by the signpost to the Youth Hostel at the Allt Ach' a' Braighe. A somewhat tentative track starts on the northern side of the burn, but soon peters out. Follow the stream upwards, passing a succession of small but spectacular gorges, and in a mile or so out up to the left towards the rounded summit of An t' Sail ("The Heel", 1609 feet).

The top is a good deal further away than it at first appears, and the convexity of the slope makes for wearisome walking. But once you reach the plateau with its cairns the going is fairly easy, and the views open up on all sides. The obvious route is straight along the middle of the broad ridge, but it is worth veering to the left to get the best views across the Rubha Coigach peninsula and away to the Stoer and the northern mountains across Enard Bay. The ridge ends at Creag Dhubh overlooking Lochan Dearg with Lochs Bad a' Ghaill ("Clumps Loch"), Bad na h'Achlaise ("The Green Loch") and Loch Lurgainn ("Shanks Loch") to the north and northwest and the twin peaks of Beinn an Eoin ("The Hill of the Bird") in front of Stac Pollaidh. This is a superb vantage-point, and a suitable mid-walk picnic spot.

From here follow the ridge south-eastwards, keeping as near as practicable to the edge if you are to have the best views. Soon the route begins to climb steeply upwards, past the 2000 foot contour, to the level plateau of Ceann Garbh ("The Hard Head"). The cliffs on the northern side of the mountain plummet to An Clu'-Nead, the wild glen below Beinn an Eoin, but less steeply to the westwards to the Dubhrach Choire and the source of the Allt' Ach' a' Braighe. The summits of these hills are covered with quartzite pebbles, and little sandy hollows which have given them the local name of "the Sandy Holes". To the south-east is the sharp peak of Sgurr an Fhidleir with the more rounded Ben More Coigach beyond.

Head due south from the summit of Ceann Garbh, and then south-east across the shallow col which separates the hill from the ridge of Beinn nan Caorach, ("the Hill of the Sheep"), also well over 2000 feet. The sandstone rocks are eroded to form weird shapes – confusing and ghostly in misty conditions! As the ridge begins to dip sharply towards the sea, cut to the right and across another shallow col to meet the shoulder leading to Cona Mheall ("the Hill of Enchantment"), where the most spectacular part of the day's walk begins.

As the shoulder narrows the views out to sea become ever more spectacular. To the west beyond the Summer Isles are spread the Outer Hebrides, and, to the south, Skye, the Torridons, and An Teallach. The summit cairn is perched on the edge of the precipice, and you will now be able to see your starting-point (and destination) 1700 feet and a mile and a half below you.

Now retrace your steps 100 yards, and pick your way down the steep and pathless boulder slope until you see to your left the subsidiary summit, the Acheninver Pinnacle, well worth a visit, and quite practicable if somewhat exposed. The gully between it and the main crags of Cona Mheall should be avoided, but make your way down the slope to the north of the crags, towards two lochans with the gorge of the Ach' a' Braighe burn beyond. Either bear left and steadily downhill, or, if you have the time, make for the burn and follow its meandering course back past its gorges to the road and your car.

(A route down the southern face of the hill may be attempted as an alternative, using the broad gully which splits the crags, but the going is dirty and loose: not for the inexperienced, or in wet weather).

AN ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP IS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FOR THIS WALK.



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WALK NO. 7: BEN MORE COIGACH - Rough: 6 hours: 7 miles

As in the case of Walk 6 this is a tough mountain ramble and should not be attempted in bad or uncertain weather. Moreover the later sections are high, exposed and for the most part trackless. Definitely not an expedition for the unadventurous, but for the mountain addict it is as exhilarating as almost anything in the North-West Highlands!

Drive south-east from Achiltibuie to the end of the tarmac road at Culnacraig where there is ample car parking space shortly before the bridge over the burn. The walk starts as a steep pull up the peaty slope which rises to the north-east of the road, and which is hemmed in by the Allt a' Coire Reidh to the left and the Allt nan Coisiche to the right, each in a deep gorge. In three-quarters of a mile the gradient begins to ease, and you should keep to the centre of the broad ridge which leads all the way to your first summit, Sgurr an Fhidleir ("The Fiddler", 2308 feet). To your left across the burn is Cona Mheall, and then the whale-back of Beinn nan Caorach, while to your right you will see the razor ridge of Garbh Choireachan ("the Cauldron") and the shapely cone of Ben More Coigach itself rising above its scree slopes.

Your route bends to the north, and in about two miles from the start you are on the rocky approach to The Fiddler, which seems a spectacularly inaccessible peak from any direction except this. The summit cairn is perched almost on the edge of the tremendous cliffs which plunge down to Lochan Tuath.

Do not attempt to leave the mountain northwards or eastwards, but follow the cliff edge south to the broad col which separates The Fiddler from Ben More Coigach itself. Make your way up the opposite slope, keeping near to the cliff edge for the best views. The crags below you are known as the Black Flags, and the sharp peak ahead is the subsidiary summit of Speicein Coinnich ("The Mossy Peak") above the corrie of Cadh' a' Mhóraire, where deer often gather. Speicein Coinnich is reached by a narrow ridge, exposed but within the capacity of the average hill-walker (assuming that he or she has a reasonably good head for heights).

Now explore the broad plateau of Ben More, in particular the weathered sandstone outcrops to the south, from which the hill falls steeply to the wild and rocky terrain stretching to the sea at Ardmair Bay and Camas Mor on Loch Broom.

Go to the dry-stone shelter which marks the summit at 2419 feet, and then follow the plateau downwards as it narrows towards the sweeping ridge of Garbh Choireachan which stretches ahead of you.

Soon a path appears out of nowhere, though even without it the route is obvious. The next mile is the highlight of the walk – perhaps the highlight of all the walking in Coigach – as the track winds over and round the rock towers which form the crest. The views to either side are magnificent, and, looking ahead, it seems as though the ridge plunges straight to the sea.

However as it starts to dip sharply, cut down over the boulder slopes to the right, heading as nearly as possible due west until you come to the edge of the deep gorge of the Allt nan Coisiche which you should follow until you are half a mile or so above Culnacraig. Here you can cross the burn and make your way along the hillside back to your car, keeping parallel to the fences guarding the croft land.

As you sink into your welcoming car seat you will be able to feel you have done ample justice to the hill-walking possibilities of Coigach!

AN ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP IS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FOR THIS WALK.



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