



Picture by Gerry Irvine
Achiltibuie Artists Gallery.

The Coble is slow, the journey never boring,

Jim's at the tiller, let the stories begin,

We spoke of the hills, the bays and the islands,

The ruined bothies and houses that stood by the shore

Extract from the 'Cainearachd' (Salmon fishing) by Sandy 'boots' Macleod

Look at Badentarbet, it has been made a desert,

Once lived in by crofters, with houses warm and quiet;

Where the stranger would get a welcome & a poor fellow his fill,

Today you see but rushes on the green swards growing still

Extract from 'Oran Badantarbairt' by Neil MacLeod, translated by Roderick F. MacLeod



Rocks from the dawn of time

-  **Durness Limestone:** Pale and dark grey limestone, commonly with caves, clints and grykes; c. 480 million years old.
-  **Basal Quartzite and Pipe Rock:** White to pink quartzite with worm burrows ('pipes') in the Pipe Rock; c. 500 million years old.
-  **Torridonian Sandstone:** Red-brown, coarse sandstone; c. 1000 million years old.
-  **Moine Rocks:** Metamorphosed sandstones and mudstones; c. 980 million years old.
-  **Lewisian Gneiss:** A stripy, pink to grey-green rock, with distinct Scourie Dykes. At c. 3000 million years old the oldest rocks of Britain.
-  **Thrust faults**



Pebble Route 2



Photograph by Maureen Fraser

Entering Coigach (koy-ack) is almost like arriving on an island, driving down the single track road past Stac Pollaidh (Polly), Rock Route point 3 (NC108095) you'd be forgiven for thinking you were driving to the end of the Earth! But for us, Coigach is the centre of the universe and the community here is vibrant and full of life. The landscape is undulating and rocky and provides a new and more breath-taking view of mountains and sea with each corner you turn.

No one really knows why this rugged patch of Scotland is called 'the fifth part' (Còigeach), perhaps it refers to a long forgotten land division. Certainly, people have lived here since the Bronze Age (4000 years ago) and hut circles are abundant. There's also an Iron Age broch (a fortified tower) just past Polglass at Achloch. Call into the craft shop at Polbain to collect an archaeological map.

The area around Badentarbat contains extensive lazy-beds (for growing potatoes) and the remains of over 30 buildings which were cleared. Salmon bothies, where men would live whilst salmon fishing are also common around the coast-line.

A mountain range, dismantled one pebble at a time...

This route lies almost completely on Torridonian sandstone which is almost unchanged from the day it was formed 1000 million years ago. This was before the Atlantic Ocean existed and instead high mountains dominated the horizon. They rose on the part of the crust which is now North America and Greenland before we Drifted Apart as the Atlantic Ocean opened up. Rivers snaked down their flanks, transporting them as sand and pebbles until eventually they eroded completely. You should find a number of places where you can see the original layering of these sediments, deposited on a hilly landscape of Lewisian gneiss.

The Lewisian gneiss can be seen at Achloch and north of the primary school where the tops of old hills of gneiss are just sticking up through the Torridonian.

Out under the waters surrounding the Summer Isles, lies a pristine glacial landscape, with deep grooves carved into solid rock under a great sheet of ice. This landscape was flooded when sea level rose at the end of the last ice age as the water from the melting ice returned to the sea.

Evoke a Sense of Place

Explore Deep Time



First life, reflected in the sunset

As ancient rivers noisily chipped away at the now vanished mountain range the first lifeforms on Earth were quietly beginning to oxygenate the atmosphere. This new abundance of oxygen bound chemically with iron in the river sediment, giving it a red hue. That's why when the sun is setting, these rocks glow red; the hill overlooking **Althandhu** is even called 'Meall Dearg' (red hill). The view point just before Althandhu (alt-an-do) is stunning whatever the weather but on a clear

day, if you look west you may see the outer **Hebridean** isles on the horizon.

Stories from a Working Landscape

Althandhu is a crofting township with many residents choosing to grow food or raise sheep. The Island with the sandy white beach in front of you is 'Isle Ristol', a Scottish Wildlife Trust reserve and the common grazing for Althandhu's sheep. The island is one of the 'Summer Isles', the archipelago

you see before you. More about them later... for now, enjoy the trip through the township, it has a lot to offer! Many of the houses were built before 1875 and the Old School House is the first building on the right. A trip out to Reiff is very worth-while, the sea-cliffs there attract rock climbers from all over the world and make a very pleasant coastal walk.

The Southern Border

As you drive along past **Polbain** you can't miss

the breath-taking views of the Summer Isles. The largest is 'Tanera Mor' whose name is a mish-mash of Old Norse and Gaelic. Some say that 'summer' comes from 'Sunn Møerr' or 'southern border' in the Norse language. Norse society in Scotland was centered in the Orkney Islands until 1472 when Scotland took them over. So you may be surveying the southern extent of a territory that extended from Shetland to the Summer Isles...

Salmon, ice and white stones

Continue along the road to **Badentarbet**. The small, shallow loch to the left of the road is an old 'ice pond', ice was collected here during the winter and stored through the summer to keep salmon fresh during transport.

The pebbles on the beach are a mix of the red sand stone but also white quartzite which usually only occurs on mountain tops in the Geopark. It's found here because it has dropped down on faults, perhaps related to the opening of the Atlantic Ocean.

Animal Islands and Tales of Treasure

Weave your way on through **Achiltibuie** then Polglass and you'll come to **Badenscallie**. Look out to sea here and you'll see the islands in the image below. They are known locally as 'Horse Island' (left) and 'Goat Island' (right). Although uninhabited now, they have been used by shepherds in the past. Many years ago, one such shepherd went over to Horse Island to tend to his livestock but stepped in a bog while he was there. When he got home and took his boots off he

found a gold coin in one of them. There had been a legend of Spanish Gold from the Amada buried somewhere close by and so he took some friends and set back out to find it. Unfortunately for them, he couldn't remember the exact spot and so they had to abandon the search!

The Pebble Route ends at a lay-by. You can take a short walk to Achininver hostel here and look out to Gairloch and beyond. There are plenty of short walks in Coigach, places to eat and drink and a fuel station.

Encourage Stewardship



Photography: Anne McGee