

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

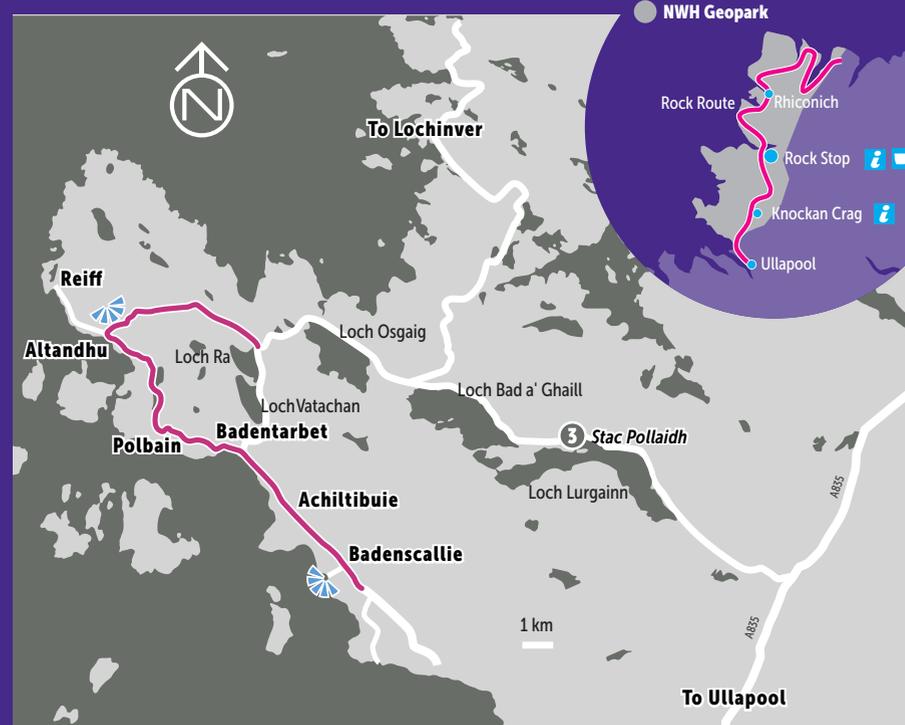
Look at Badentarbet, it has been made a desert,

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



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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 Achlochlan. 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.

What is a Geopark?

Geoparks are set up and managed by a local community and there are more than 100 Geoparks worldwide.

Every community is different and so every Geopark is different but we all share a common aim which is to tell the story of our landscape and make it accessible to visitors.

This in turn helps to bring resources into sensitive rural areas, creating jobs and supporting small businesses.

What is the NWH Geopark?

A Social Enterprise, set up by the representatives from the six community councils within its boundaries. It exists to:

Explore Deep Time, Evoke a Sense of Place and Encourage Stewardship

This means encouraging adventures for everyone which helps people connect with the land and feel responsible for maintaining its beauty, wildlife and resources.

Evoke a Sense of Place

Explore Deep Time



First life, reflected in the sunset

The rock exposures you see in Coigach are mostly **Torridonian sandstone**, the oldest sedimentary rock in Britain at 1.2 billion years old. It represents ancient river deposits, laid down just as the first lifeforms on Earth were 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 Moerr' 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 round here. It's found here because there was a mega-scale landslip between Achnahaird and Badentarbet millions of years ago which dropped the quartzite to sea-level.

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



Althandhu NB984132



Photography: Anne McGee

Horse Island from NC036061