

A series of family friendly walks first written by Jim, for the Shieldaig Tourist Booklet:

1. Coulin Walk

One of the best introductory low level walks in the area is found at Coulin Estate, in Glen Torridon. Please note that this walk takes you over some private land.

The complete round trip is five miles and should take between two and three hours. This is a family friendly walk that is flat and suitable for carrying infants in a papoose.

Chris Lowe, author of *Torridon, the Nature of the Place* pays special tribute to this walk: 'The stands of native Scots Pine scattered around Lochs Clair and Coulin are such fine examples of the remnants of Caledonian forest that two areas have been designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The plant life is varied and the combination of freshwater loch and hills give excellent scope for bird watching.'

Car parking for this walk is relatively straightforward. At the road end for the estate (OS map sheet 25 Grid Reference NH 002582) there is a small area that will hold about four cars. Please do not use the passing places or drive down the private road to park.

The route of the walk is easy to find and follow. It is probably best to do it in a clockwise direction so that the best views can be enjoyed without having to concentrate on your feet too much!

Walk down the tarmac road towards the end of Loch Clair. Once you reach the end of the loch you will see a little gate with a footpath sign facing you, but on the left hand side of the road. Take this path rather than continuing on the road and crossing the wooden bridge. When you reach another footpath sign be careful to take the path down to the right not the wider track that heads up the hill into the trees. At this point the views to the south really open out and the bigger hills around Coulin Estate begin to catch the eye.

The path is often a bit muddy in places. Please try to stay on the little path which has had some planks put on it to help but watch your footing as they can be slippery. You are aiming for the white building called *Torran-cuilinn*. Once this building has been reached head across to the big wooden bridge across the River Coulin. If you have not been looking over your shoulder on the way out you will now be rewarded with spectacular views of the mountain called *Beinn Eighe*. Take time to enjoy this view, as it is not fully appreciated from the confines of a car in Glen Torridon.

To return to the start of the walk simply follow this good track towards the main estate buildings. Once the last keeper's house is passed on the left you should see the wooden bridge up ahead. Cross this bridge and then follow your outward route back to the public road at Glen Torridon.

2. A walk around Loch Dughail

Many thanks to Richard & Claire Munday of Kinloch, Shieldaig for suggesting this as a walk.

This is a moderate walk of just over 4.5km, which at a leisurely pace might take a couple of hours. The time taken will depend on whether you stop to look at the fish ladder at Kinloch or any other points of interest on the way. The walk can involve a river crossing, which is why it has been elevated to the category of moderate as opposed to easy. With care this is a child friendly walk, some parts a small child might be able to walk and other parts they will most definitely need carried.

I suggest that you park at the south end of Loch Dughail and have a look at the state of the river crossing. Should you not want to attempt crossing it simply return the way you came once you reach the river. If you do get wet crossing the river it is then only a couple of hundred meters back to your car.

The route of the walk is very easy to follow: (1) From your car follow the A890 Lochcarron to Shieldaig road back to the junction with the 'coast road' to Kenmore and Applecross. (2) At the junction turn left and walk down towards the sign for the Shieldaig Sea Trout Project. If the visitor centre is open this is well worth the visit. You might also want to take a look at the fish ladder further along the road. Please take care when crossing the barrier and for safety reasons stop at the top of the steps down to the river. (3) Having learnt all about sea trout carry on up the road until you come to a large gate across from a house called 'Rover'. Please take a moment to refer to the sign describing arrangements for access and deer management. (4) Now go through the gate and follow the sometimes muddy path which is marked by posts with a red arrow. Your route is now passing through part of Kinloch Estate where a programme of tree planting and natural regeneration is taking place. This is part of a wider Forestry Commission programme to restore our native woodlands. As you walk along the path take time to look behind you, as the views out across Kinloch to Loch Shieldaig are enchanting. The path does start to steepen towards an important burn crossing. When you reach the burn cross it and then follow the deer fence down for some 200 metres until you come to a gate. Go through the gate and follow the track down to a second gate by Loch Dughail. (5) Go through that gate and walk along the shore for a couple of hundred meters until you can see three large boulders in the river. This is the point where you will either re-trace your steps all the way back to your car, or if it is safe to do so, cross the river. The young and adventurous can boulder hop; the older and wiser will paddle. Once across the river simply follow the road back to your car.

3. Walk to fank, or up hill.

This walk starts and ends at campsite in Shildaig, just beside the war memorial.

Please note that this is a far more adventurous than the ones described here for the last two years. Perhaps it is better suited to families with older children who can walk all of the way. If at all unsure please ask in the village for local advice.

The walk can be finished at fank and simply return the way you came. This is especially useful if there is a strong westerly wind as this side of the peninsula is somewhat sheltered.

There is also the option of carrying on up a section without a path to the top of the hill overlooking Shildaig. This route also avoids getting closer to the rather unsightly fish farm further round the coast.

On the way you pass a crag across the road from a barn. You might even see some rock climbers there!

Start your walk by following the road from the campsite out of the village towards the church. From the junction carefully walk along the road for about 400 metres until you see an obvious rock face with a square block in it. Aim for this rock outcrop and you should find a small path which winds through some small rocky steps towards the flatter ground near to the coastline. If in doubt all you need to do is keep closer to the shore on your left and not go up hill too early. Continue until you come to some ruins of a sheep fank and a wall. Look out for a tree beside the wall and then from the fank head up the broad grassy gully heading for the first obvious section of rocky slabs. From here the key is then moving left to meet the lovely rusted fence which will then lead you very close to the summit with a cairn.

To descend head towards the houses underneath Beinn Shildaig. Be careful not to head straight down without seeing where you are going, as there are some steep rocks on this hillside. Don't worry as this all soon eases off and you will be able to see the way more clearly as you drop down steadily towards the campsite. Just before the road you will walk past the memorial to locals lost in WWI & WWII.

Might take one and a half hours, perhaps less if you go quickly or can easily be extended with further exploration around the fank. Should you have found this all a bit too easy come back the first weekend in August to our village fete and climb this hill as part of the annual hill race!

4. Walk to Lochan Coire na Poite

This walk appears in the Cicerone publication 'Torridon A Walkers Guide', by Peter Barton. The walk is approximately 6 miles and should take about 4 hours. The first section is on a well marked track then the route leaves this to go across rough, heathery ground to the lochan.

Please note that I would not recommend doing this walk with small children or those who are not confident on their feet. You should return the same way as you came.

Leave the car park at the bridge near Tornapress and follow a very good track which heads more or less north to the direction of Loch Lundie. However I suggest that after 2 or 3 miles you head west on rough ground to Lochan Coire na Poite. The best line is to follow the burn draining southeast from the lochan itself. This is very rough going for about one mile but the rewards when you reach the lochan are well worth the effort. There is a lovely sandy beach with fantastic views up to the massive cliffs of Beinn Bhan. These corries are not often visited in the summer so you might be lucky enough to have the place to yourself. Coire na Poite is particularly dramatic as it is enclosed by two ridges, A'Chioch to the south and A'Phoit to the north.

Please return to the starting point by heading back the way that you have come.

5. Scottish Natural Heritage trails at Kinlochewe.

This very family-friendly walk is not in the immediate Shieldaig area. You will need to get to Kinlochewe. This is possible by public transport but as it aimed at families perhaps most folk will drive there.

The walk begins at the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) visitor centre at Anancaun, just out of Kinlochewe on the Loch Maree road. There is plenty of safe parking where small children, wheelchairs or buggies can be organised before setting off.

This is an 'out and back' walk of about 4 kilometres along a purpose made path. The turnaround point is at a bridge beside a picnic table where there are can be great views of the east end of Beinn Eighe.

Depending on how fast you want to walk this can take an hour or two. The views can be lovely so there is no need to rush.

The Walk:

From the visitor centre follow the path marked for Kinlochewe. The surface on this path is excellent and has a lovely camber, which makes it suitable for almost everyone. There are wooden signposts along the way to make it easy to follow once you are on it.

At the first junction take the path that is signposted for 'Beinn Eighe'. Shortly after this there is a picnic bench to have a wee stop for a look at the view or have a bite to eat. The path now continues parallel to the Glen Torridon road and heads towards the bridge and another picnic bench mentioned in the introduction. This is a suitable point to aim for with small children, and for the purposes of this walk, marks the point to turn back.

For some variety on the way back take a detour through Kinlochewe before linking up with the path again, via a bridge just behind the petrol station.

Once back at your car I recommend going into the SNH visitor centre to find out some more about this special area. The centre is open Easter to 31st October.