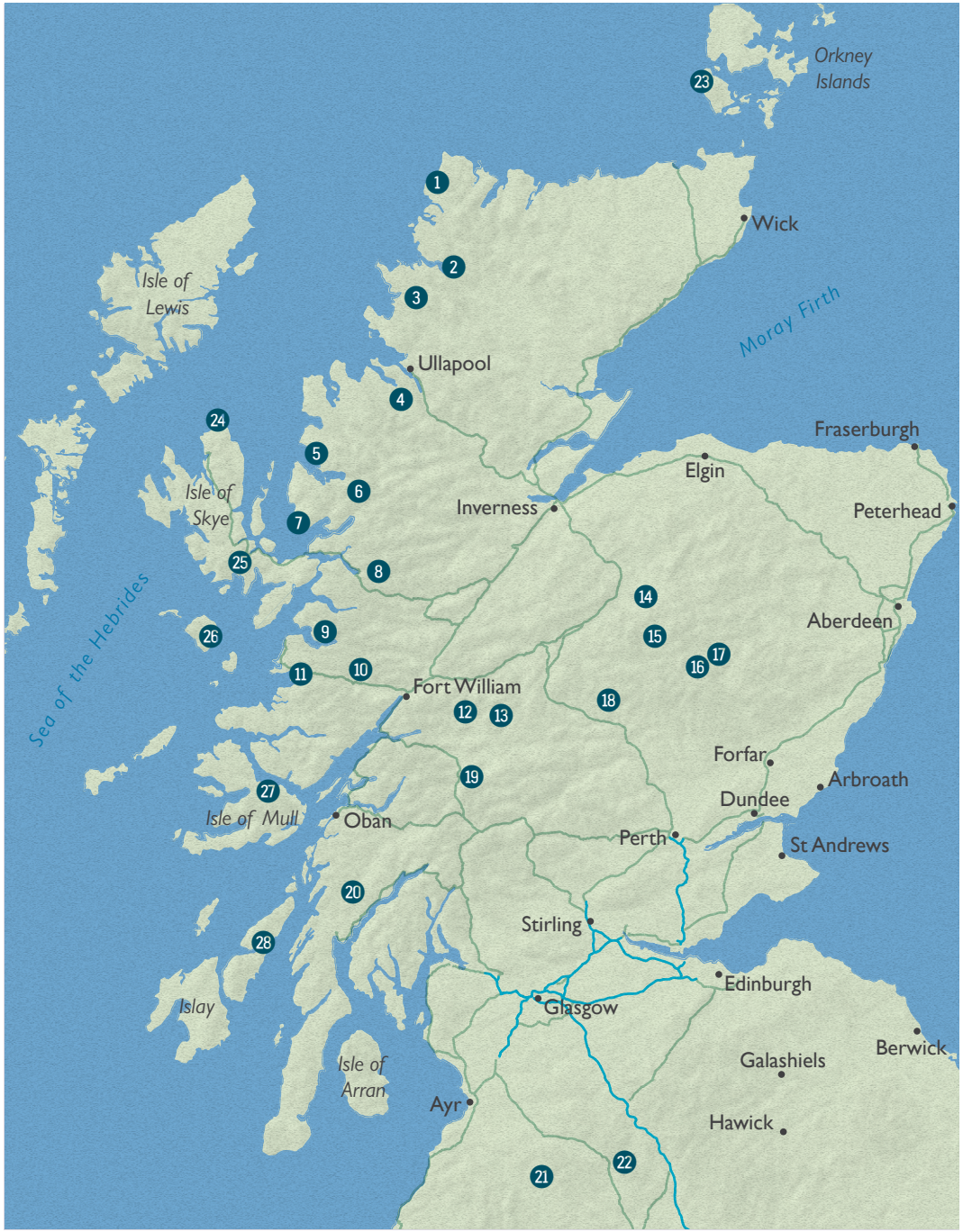
SCOTTISH BOTHY WALKS

Scotland's 28 best bothy adventures

GEOFF ALLAN

WILD THINGS PUBLISHING


SCOTTISH
BOTHY
WALKS



CONTENTS

Table of Walks 6
Introduction 9
Bothies & bothying 13
How to use this guide 16
Clothing & other essentials 18
Safety 20

NORTHERN HIGHLANDS

01. Sandwood Bay & the bothies at Strathchailleach & Strathan 24
02. Beinn Leòid from Kylestrome visiting Glendhu & Glencoul 32
03. Suilven & Suileag Bothy from Glencanisp Lodge 42
04. Beinn Dearg Mòr & Shenavall Bothy 50

NORTH WEST HIGHLANDS

05. Mesolithic Cave & Shell Midden beyond Craig Bothy in Torridon 62
06. Coire Fionnaraich Bothy & a circuit of Maol Chean-dearg 68
07. Uags Bothy & the Applecross Peninsula 76
08. Beinn Fhada & Camban Bothy 82

WESTERN HIGHLANDS

09. Knoydart & the Rough Bounds via Sourlies Bothy 92
10. Streap & Gleann Dubh-lighe Bothy 104
11. Peanmeanach Bothy & the Ardnish Peninsula 112

CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

12. Overnight at Staoineag Bothy 120
13. A Ben Alder crossing from Rannoch to Corrour station 126

EASTERN HIGHLANDS

14. Meall a' Bhuachaille & Ryvoan Bothy 136
15. Ben Macdui visiting Bob Scott's Bothy & Hutchison Memorial Hut 142
16. Callater Stables & Loch Kander 152
17. Lochnagar from Balmoral & Gelder Shiel Stables 158
18. Beinn Dearg & Allt Scheicheachan Bothy 166

SOUTH WEST HIGHLANDS

19. Beinn a'Chreachain & Beinn Achaladair via Gorton Bothy 174
20. Kilneuair by Loch Awe to Carron Bothy 182

SOUTHERN SCOTLAND

21. Clennoch Bothy & Cairnsmore of Carsphairn 190
22. Kettleton Byre & Scaw'd Law 196

THE ISLANDS

23. Burnmouth Cottage, Rackwick Bay & The Old Man of Hoy 204
24. The Lookout & Rubha Hunish on Skye 210
25. New Camasunary Bothy, the 'Bad Step' & Loch Coruisk 216
26. Dibidil Bothy & the Rùm Cuillin 224
27. Beinn Talaidh & Tomsleibhe Bothy, Mull 234
28. Jura's remote coastal bothies Cruib & Ruantallain 240

APPENDIX

Munros, Corbetts & Grahams 250
Gaelic glossary 251
Bibliography 252
Copyright & Acknowledgements 256

NO.	NAME	DISTANCE	WALKING TIME	TOTAL ASCENT	SUMMITS	NAVIGATION	TERRAIN	DIFFICULTY
01	Sandwood Bay & the bothies at Strathchailleach & Strathan	22km/14 miles	7.5-9.5 hours (over 2 days)	520m		Straightforward	Challenging	Straightforward
02	Beinn Leòid from Kylestrome visiting Glendhu & Glencoul	36km/22.5 miles	11-14 hours (over 3 days)	1200m	Beinn Leòid (Corbett), 792m	Challenging	Challenging	Challenging
03	Suilven & Suileag Bothy from Glencanisp Lodge	19km/12 miles	6-8 hours	836m	Caisteal Liath (Corbett), 731m	Easy	Straightforward	Straightforward
04	Beinn Dearg Mòr & Shenavall Bothy	25km/15.5 miles	8-10 hours	1530m	Beinn Dearg Mòr (Corbett), 906m	Straightforward	Challenging (steep climb)	Challenging
05	Mesolithic Cave & Shell Midden beyond Craig Bothy in Torridon	12km/7.5 miles	4-5 hours	154m		Easy	Easy	Easy
06	Coire Fionnaraich Bothy & a circuit of Maol Chean-dearg	19km/12 miles	6-7 hours	713m		Straightforward	Easy	Straightforward
07	Uags Bothy & the Applecross Peninsula	11km/7 miles	4-5 hours	169m		Easy	Easy	Easy
08	Beinn Fhada & Camban Bothy	25.75km/16 miles	8-10 hours	1234m	Beinn Fhada (Munro), 1032 m; Sgùrr a' Dubh Doire (Munro Top), 962m	Challenging	Straightforward	Challenging
09	Knoydart & the Rough Bounds via Sourlies Bothy	44km/27.25 miles	14-17 hours (over 2 days)	1790m		Straightforward	Straightforward	Challenging
10	Streap & Gleann Dubh-lighe Bothy	17.5km/11 miles	6-8 hours	1197m	Meall an Uillt Chaoil, 844m; Stob Coire nan Cearc, 887m; Streap (Corbett), 909m; Streap Comhlaidh, 898m	Straightforward	Straightforward/ Challenging	Straightforward/ Challenging
11	Peanmeanach Bothy & The Ardnish Peninsula	11km/7 miles	4-5 hours	187m		Easy	Easy	Straightforward
12	Overnight at Staoineag Bothy	17km/10.5 miles	5-6 hours (over 2 days)	100m		Easy	Easy	Straightforward
13	A Ben Alder Crossing from Rannoch to Corrour Station	30km/18.5 miles	9-11 hours (over 2 days)	750m		Easy	Challenging	Challenging
14	Meall a' Bhuachaille & Ryvoan Bothy	9km/5.5 miles	4.5-5.5 hours	570m		Easy	Easy	Easy
15	Ben Macdui visiting Bob Scott's Bothy & Hutchison Memorial Hut	32km/20 miles	10-12 hours	1440m	Ben Macdui (Munro), 1309m; Stob Coire Sputan Dearg (Munro Top), 1249m; Sròn Riach (Munro Top), 1113m	Challenging	Straightforward/ Challenging	Challenging
16	Callater Stables & Loch Kander	19m/12 miles	6-8 hours	790m		Easy	Straightforward	Straightforward
17	Lochnagar from Balmoral & Gelder Shiel Stables	21km/13 miles	6-8 hours	1089m	Lochnagar/Cac Carn Beag (Munro), 1115m; Cac Carn Mòr, 1150m	Straightforward	Straightforward	Straightforward/ Challenging
18	Beinn Dearg & Allt Scheicheachan Bothy	29km/18 miles	9-11 hours	1377m	Beinn Dearg (Munro), 1008m	Straightforward	Straightforward	Challenging
19	Beinn a'Chreachain & Beinn Achaladair via Gorton Bothy	25.5km/15.5 miles	8-10 hours	1300m	Beinn a'Chreachain (Munro), 1081m; Meall Buidhe (Munro Top), 978m; Beinn Achaladair (Munro), 1038m; South Top, 1002m	Straightforward	Straightforward	Challenging
20	Kilneuair by Loch Awe to Carron Bothy	17km/10.5 miles	5-6 hours	727m		Easy	Easy	Straightforward
21	Clennoch Bothy & Cairnsmore of Carsphairn	18km/11 miles	6-7 hours	890m	Cairnsmore of Carsphairn (Corbett), 797m; Beninner (Donald Top), 710m	Straightforward	Straightforward	Straightforward
22	Kettleton Byre & Scaw'd Law	12km/7.5 miles	3.5-4.5 hours	590m	Scaw'd Law (Donald), 663m; Little Scaw'd Law, 594m; Glenleith Fell (Donald Top), 612m–quick detour from route	Easy	Easy	Easy
23	Burnmouth Cottage, Rackwick Bay & The Old Man of Hoy	11km/7 miles	4-5 hours	190m		Easy	Easy	Easy
24	The Lookout & Rubha Hunish on Skye	4km/2.5 miles	3-4 hours	93m		Easy	Easy (one short scramble)	Easy
25	New Camasunary Bothy, the 'Bad Step' & Loch Coruisk	29km/18 miles	10-12 hours	670m		Easy	Hard (serious rock traverse)	Challenging
26	Dibidil Bothy & the Rùm Cuillin	20.5km/13 miles	10-12 hours	1900m	Askival (Corbett), 812m; Ainshval (Corbett), 781m; Trollabhal (Graham), 702m; Sgùrr nan Gillean (Corbett Top), 764m; Hallival, 723m.	Challenging	Hard (ridge scramble)	Challenging
27	Beinn Talaidh & Tomsleibhe Bothy, Mull	18km/11 miles	5-6 hours	748m	Beinn Talaidh (Graham), 761m	Easy	Straightforward	Straightforward
28	Jura's remote coastal bothies Cruib & Ruantallain	27km/17 miles	9-12 hours (over 3 days)	140m		Challenging	Challenging	Challenging



APPROACHING THE 'BAD STEP' ON SKYE (WALK 25)

INTRODUCTION

Bothy Walks is a natural companion to my first book, *The Scottish Bothy Bible*. In this volume, I showcase some of the best bothies in the country, setting out a range of short hikes, mountain climbs and multi-day expeditions using these unique shelters as a focal point. Over the last two years I have eagerly retraced my steps around the bothy network, checking out routes for inclusion here, and adding a raft of new images to my photographic archive. My aim has been to tempt you out into Scotland's rugged and beautiful landscape, whatever your level of ability. The walks range from a stroll along the cliffs above Rackwick Bay to the Old Man of Hoy on the Orkney Archipelago, to a challenging traverse of the 'Bad Step' on Skye. As well as including all the essential technical details, each entry offers a taste of what makes the area special, from its unique geology, wildlife and flora, to the intriguing history and culture of its people. And there are a few personal reminiscences along the way...

Even after more than 30 years spent exploring Scotland's nooks and crannies, I still feel a surge of anticipation and delight when I see a bothy in the distance, even if I have visited it many times before. My adventures into the bothy world began during my student days in the late-1980s, when I became an enthusiastic member of the Edinburgh University Mountaineering Club. By my second year of study, I was bothy secretary for the club hut, Glenlicht House, tucked away beneath the mountains of Kintail, and had begun to seek out bothy locations. At the time, these were closely guarded secrets, held only by a knowledgeable few. One of my first discoveries was the Mountain Bothies Association (MBA) bothy at Camban (described in Walk 8), which sits on the lonely pass between Glen Affric and Gleann Lichd. I vividly remember staring up at the mist-laden Munros surrounding the bothy, not quite believing that this isolated refuge was free to use by anyone who had the wherewithal to get there. Soon I had acquired a prized copy of the MBA bothy grid references (finally published online by the MBA in 2009), and stumbled upon Irvine Butterfield's 1972 *Survey of Shelters in Remote Mountain Areas of the Scottish Highlands*. This treasure trove of information became the basis of my own precious bothy list, and inspired an even greater passion to travel around the country.

Through my love affair with bothies I have developed an intimate personal relationship with the Scottish Highlands, a bond that has only intensified since the autumn of 2011, when I hit upon the idea of producing a countrywide bothy guide. Without the use of a car, it took five years to complete the survey and research all the background material – the vast majority of fieldwork undertaken using my trusty bike and public transport. With the luxury of time, I have been lucky enough to rediscover the country at a slower pace and get a deeper feel for the history that has played out across the landscape over millennia. *The Scottish Bothy Bible* was finally published in March 2017 and went on to win UK Travel Guidebook of the Year.

Much thought has been invested in choosing the walks and bothies in this guide. The selection represents my absolute favourite





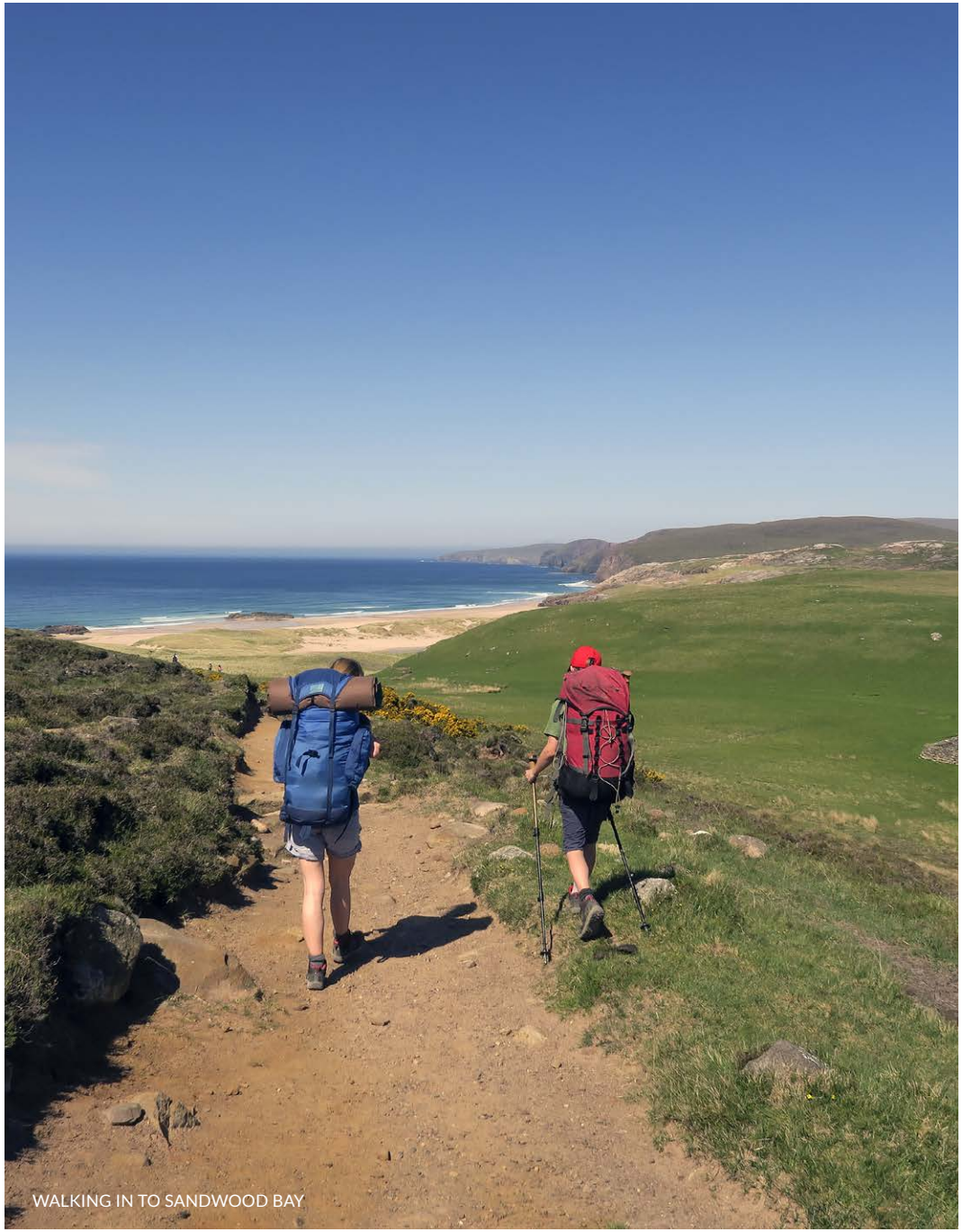
bothy locations with the most memorable and beautiful approaches. You will find routes that not only range over the whole of Scotland, but also are suitable for a broad spectrum of fitness levels and experience. I have included a mix of day walks and multi-day adventures, and have been conscious not to create itineraries that are too complex or that replicate suggestions in other Scottish walking books. All the day walks return to the same location, whether circular or there-and-back, so there is no requirement for two cars or an anxious hitch-hike to retrieve a vehicle. It is also important to emphasise that each bothy is a worthy objective in itself, as well as a base from which to climb mountain tops or explore additional places of interest. On a *dreich* morning or a lazy sunny afternoon I have often set out to visit a bothy just to have a look around. Happiness comes from the satisfaction of having a simple objective combined with the opportunity to venture off the beaten track.



Creating *The Scottish Bothy Bible* was a life-changing experience for me, and I hope *Scottish Bothy Walks* will encourage even more people out into the hills. Enjoy the descriptions of the walks and the photographs that accompany them. Hopefully they will inspire you to make your own journeys and build lasting relationships with the bothies and mountains that I know and love.



CROSSING THE PARPH, SOUTH OF CAPE WRATH (WALK 1)



WALKING IN TO SANDWOOD BAY

SANDWOOD BAY & THE BOTHIES AT STRATHCHAILLEACH & STRATHAN

Two-day expedition to Scotland's far north-western corner, combining sensational Sandwood Bay with visits to two of Scotland's most remote and picturesque bothies.

Exposed to the hypnotic rhythm of the North Atlantic swell, Sandwood is the jewel among the unspoiled bays of Scotland's precious coastal fringes. Yet this dynamic, sweeping stretch of platinum-blonde sand, high dunes, and rugged cliff, with a distinctive sea stack at its southern end, remains remarkably untouched. Footprints are the only marks left at the turn of each tide. Owned by the John Muir Trust since 1993, the mile and a half of strand has become better known of late, but is never crowded and retains its wild feel.

Inland lies the Parph, a remote, trackless expanse of peat and upland moor that is home to two special bothies, each with a fascinating story. Strathchailleach (Valley of the Old Woman), to the north-east, lays claim to be the last permanently inhabited building in the UK without any piped water, gas or electricity, and was occupied as recently as 1996. Strathan, to the south, had temporary residents in 2000 when a couple moved in with the intention of setting up a working croft, only to be evicted four months later. Those inspired to travel so far north and undertake this truly remarkable journey – unique in Britain – will always treasure the memory.

Day 1. It is a fair step to Sandwood and on to Strathchailleach, but if you are lucky with the weather, bothy walk-ins don't get much better than this. ❶ From the car park at Blairmore, a well-maintained track threads its way through common grazing land, past a series of fetching lochans all the way to the bay. As the trail contours round Druim na Buainn, the dunes come

INFORMATION

MAPS: LR 9 Cape Wrath, Explorer 446 Durness & Cape Wrath.
START/END GRID REF: NC 195 601. John Muir car park at Blairmore: toilets and drinking water on site. Donations welcome.
DISTANCE: 22.5km/14 miles
DAY 1: 10.5km/6.5 miles
TIME: 3.5–4.5 hours
DAY 2: 12km/7.5 miles
TIME: 4–5 hours
TOTAL ASCENT: 520m
HIGHEST POINT: 230m
NAVIGATION: Straightforward
TERRAIN: Challenging. Tracks, faint trails, open moor.
DIFFICULTY: Straightforward
PUBLIC TRANSPORT: Scottish Citylink service 961/Stagecoach Highland service 61 Inverness-Ullapool. Durness Bike Bus (01463 419160) and The Durness Bus (01971 511223) Group booking bus service. North West Community Bus Association's service 890 Ullapool to Kinlochbervie (01971 521054).
SPECIAL NOTES: Both bothies are open all year round. Sandwood Bay is a nature reserve owned and managed by the John Muir Trust. Keep dogs under control to avoid disturbing free-roaming sheep and ground-nesting birds.

enticingly into view, while cliffs to the north of the bay snake away up to Cape Wrath. On a clear day you can just glimpse the lighthouse on the promontory, a bright white speck on the horizon. Before it was built in 1828, the coastline was notorious for shipwrecks and locals still tell of the ghostly mariner who roams the strand on stormy nights.

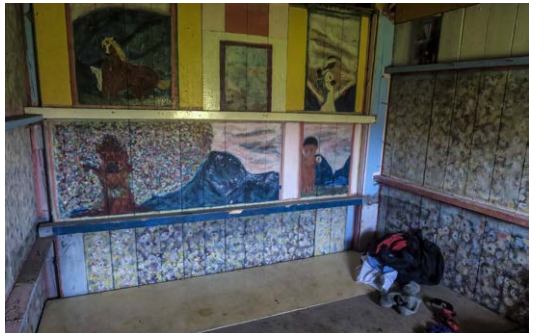
❷ From here, you are irresistibly drawn down to the wide expanse of sandy shoreline stretching away into the distance, the sound of the waves a constant presence. Walking out to the breakers, the monumental stack, Am Buachaille (the Herdsman), makes its presence felt, with the rocky outcrop, Am Balg, visible a little further out. Alongside the sand, a huge dune system has built up over millennia, evidence of the wind's immense power in this exposed location. Even on a sun-kissed afternoon there is always a hint of a breeze, while in winter, hurricane-force gales whip in from the Atlantic. Home to ground-nesting dunlins and ringed plovers, the sand is held in check by marram grass. Beyond, a carpet of rare machair leads back to freshwater Sandwood Loch.

Striding up to the north end of the beach, you reach the brackish outflow from the loch, a wide channel that is easily crossed in dry conditions but in times of spate is more of a challenge and best tackled close to the shore. Few visitors venture this far, and you may have the rest of the beach to yourself. ❸ Once up through the broken rocks to the clifftop, it is tempting to plough straight across the moor towards Lochan nan Sac, then onto the Strathchailleach, hidden between the peat hags. However, easier terrain is found on a vague path along the southern bank of the Strath Chailleach, which meanders round to the bothy, though it adds another half a mile to the walk. From late spring, pink lousewort and round leaf orchids can be found among tall cotton grass and prostrate juniper. And if you are keen, there is a chance to wild swim in one of the numerous pools.

Strathchailleach Bothy is a tiny stone cottage with a low facade, and most need to stoop before stepping over the threshold into the world of hermit James MacRory-Smith. Known locally as Sandy, he was a cantankerous old soul, who lived here without running water, gas or electricity for 32 years, before ill health forced him to leave in 1996. The interior's most distinctive feature is a series of simple frescoes he painted over the years, some with astrological themes. Although his home-made bellows have been removed and the kitchen area is now a two-person dormitory, as you sit in front of a slow-burning peat fire (from the ample supplies cut by the generous maintenance officer), Sandy's presence is almost palpable. The few he invited into his abode might, if the mood took him, be regaled with stories of his hermit's life. Increasingly used by hikers finishing the Cape Wrath Trail as well as visitors curious to see this living museum, the bothy now boasts additional bunk beds.

Day 2. Leaving for Strathan, there is a frisson of anticipation as you envisage the route ahead across the pathless moor. ❹ Head due south over the stile in the sheep fence, climbing steadily past Lochan Beul na Faireachan, and on to the shoulder of An Grianan. It is slow-going if the









STRATHCHAILLEACH BOTHY



STRATHAN BOTHY



terrain is saturated, but it gets easier with altitude as the vegetation thins. 5 From a high point, pick a line down to the valley below, crossing a number of small tributaries that funnel down to the river. It is exhilarating being in such open terrain, using your experience to measure the lie of the land, and steer a course as efficiently as possible down to the floodplain. The key point of orientation, especially in poor visibility, is the sharp meander where the V-shaped notch of the Allt a Ghleannain rushes down into the main channel. Once across this stream, a faint but increasingly obvious path leads on to the bothy at Strathan just over 500 yards further on, its bright red front door a most welcome sight. Similar in style to Strathchailleach, the bothy is set in good pastureland, the river and an old well are close by, and there is a peat bank with bricks built up to dry over the summer. No wonder this secluded spot attracted the attention of Robbie and Anne Northway, a travelling couple who quite brazenly moved in during the spring of 2000. They intended to set up a working croft, to the consternation of the MBA and local community. After four months of campaigning, and police intervention, the couple were evicted, leaving the cottage open to all once more.

After walking over from Strathchailleach through wild, trackless land, there is a reasonably clear path back to the single-track road from Kinlochbervie out to Blairmore. However, the terrain can be rather tough-going where the trail, surrounded by a swathe of waterlogged peatbog, picks its way along the shoreline of two small lochs. 6 Once over the suspension footbridge,



you follow the faint path zigzagging up the slope. At the top of the rise and looking out over the flat expanse of peatland to the coast, you can trace the inward route to Sandwood, a yellow smudge in the distance. Once past the two lochans, concentrate hard and keep the path in sight so you don't end up knee-deep in the bog! 7 Fortunately, you can follow a line of wooden poles (quite widely spaced) heading west back to a farm track, and onto the road. The house at the roadside doesn't seem to get any closer for an inordinate amount of time, but then suddenly you are back in civilisation, elated to have achieved your goal. On the final mile back to the car park you can relax and relive the experience of a fantastic expedition. There is nothing quite like it in the whole of the UK.

Notes: The route described is split into two days. It is quite feasible to complete the circuit in one day, though this is only recommended in the summer months with long daylight hours. The terrain across the Parph can be quite unforgiving underfoot so allow additional time. The first section of the route follows the route of the Cape Wrath Trail.

Day 1
Blairmore to Strathchailleach

1 From the John Muir Trust (JMT) car park at Blairmore head along the track signposted to Sandwood, through a gate blocking vehicular access, past a series of lochans to the bay, following the route of the Cape Wrath Trail.
6.5km/4 miles

2 Traverse the beach heading N, crossing the outflow from Sandwood Loch, which can be a hazard when in spate.
0.8km/0.5 miles

3 Ascend the broken rocks to the clifftop just beyond the outflow, then walk along the cliff to the riverbank of the Strath Chailleach at (NC 232 663). Negotiate the sheep fence and walk inland, following the meanders of the Strath Chailleach, then cut across the final section of moor to follow the faint path all the way to the bothy (NC 249 658). Alternatively from the clifftop head straight across the pathless moor ENE past Lochan nan Sac. Head on to a stile in the sheep fence (NC 244 657) and quickly reach the bothy. Although this route is half a mile shorter, it is tough-going especially if the ground is saturated.
3.2km/2 miles

Day 2
Strathchailleach to Blairemore

4 From Strathchailleach Bothy head due S, climbing over a stile on the sheep fence running parallel to the glen (NC 244 657). From the bothy door you can see the tall, wooden pole by the stile. Climb steadily up the pathless moor past Lochan Beul na Faireachan, and on to the W shoulder of An Grianan.
2km/1.25 miles

5 Pick out a route down into Strath Shinary, crossing a couple of small streams before reaching the E bank of the Abhainn an t-Srathain. Follow the river S to the sharp bend (NC 242 618), where the Allt a' Ghleannain flows into the main channel. Once across this stream, a faint but increasingly obvious path leads on to the bothy at Strathan, just over 500 yards further on (NC 247 612).
3.2km/2 miles



6 From the bothy walk down to a suspension footbridge over the Abhainn an t-Srathain, and once across turn L along the bank for 200 yds. Then pick up a path zigzagging up the slope onto the open moor. Skirt round the northern shore of two lochs following a boggy path. (Hard going in saturated conditions.)
3.2km/2 miles

7 At the S end of the second loch, Loch Mòr a' Chraisg (NC 224 603), look for a faint path that follows a line of wooden poles set at wide intervals and then on to the track marked with a cairn (NC 212 602).
1.3km/0.75 miles

8 Continuing along the track, reach the single-track road from Kinlochbervie, turn R and follow it back to the car park at Blairmore.
2.5km/1.5 miles

