



SKYE & LOCHALSH EXPEDITION AREA

Useful information from the Expedition Network

Welcome!

Green forms and requests for assessment should be submitted to the Scottish Network Co-ordinator, who can also assist with enquiries regarding routes and campsites.

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Area advisor

The local area advisor is based in the area and can assist with enquiries regarding routes and campsites.

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(if you wish to call, please email first to arrange a time)

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Introduction

Although one island Skye is practically separated into three different areas for expeditions because there are no routes other than roads between the separate limbs of the island. Groups wanting to move between the area around the Cullin and south, Trotternish, and the west including Dunvegan, need to be prepared for significant periods of off path walking through very boggy conditions.

For a DofE expedition “All roads must be avoided unless absolutely necessary when linking two sections of route together” (*Expedition Guide*, page 36). This limits possible routes on Skye, for example the Skye trail is a well publicised unofficial walking route across Skye, but includes entire days on roads.

Groups who wish to do their expeditions on Skye must be prepared to embrace these challenges as part of their expedition and planning process.

Area boundaries

The DofE website includes a downloadable [PDF map](#).



Route updates

For mountaineers the biggest draw to Skye is the Cullin ridge. The Cullin ridge is a steep and rocky ridge that is the most alpine-style ridge in the UK. Climbing this ridge is a challenge for experienced mountaineers, and therefore entirely inappropriate for most DofE teams to attempt. Rare teams who believe they have the skills and equipment to attempt mountains on the ridge in an 'unaccompanied and self-sufficient' fashion will be mountaineering, and therefore undertaking a different mode of travel to a foot expedition, requiring different skills and equipment. Any groups considering this must consult with their regional office about their plans.

Teams planning daywalks on the Cullin ridge should plan to do this as a separate exercise either before or after their main expedition.

- The path between Elgol and Camasunary bothy (between NG 519 138 and NG 517 185) is generally unsuitable for DofE teams. It is along a very narrow path over a steep drop, where a slip or stumble is likely, and the consequences could be very serious, especially DofE teams whose balance is affected by a large pack. There was a fatal accident involving a walker on this route in 2018. The recommended alternative route is the track between Camasunary and Kirkibost (between NG 519 138 and NG 545 172)
- To avoid a significant amount of road walking north of Kirkibost teams can follow the Abhainn Cille Mhaire north off path up its valley, up to a bealach where the team can traverse around to join the path coming down from Bla Bheinn. The Bla Bheinn path goes alongside a steep ravine to the south, but there is a plenty of ground to the north where they can move away from the edge.
- The path between Coruisk and Camasunary bothy by the coast includes a section of scrambling known as 'the bad step'. This requires scrambling along a flake of rock leaning back and out over the sea. There is no bypass path, and therefore this route is usually unsuitable for DofE teams.
- The only easy route in and out of Loch Coruisk (aside from the boat!) is over the path over Druim Hain from Strath na Creitheach. There is a col just SW of Sgurr Hain which offers an alternative steep off-path route. For most groups there is no viable direct route between Camasunary and Coruisk or Coruisk and Glen Brittle.
- In Glen Sligachan the crossing of the Allt na Measarrch is often more challenging than expected as this stream can rise significantly. Teams should make alternative bad weather plans that take account of this.
- There is no bridge over the Abhainn Cama Fhionnairigh downstream of Loch na Creitheach to get between Camasunary bothy and Sgurr na Stir and Sgurr Hain.
- The carpark for the Fairy pools (NG 425 261) is an incredibly popular tourist destination, with parking often overflowing the carpark onto the side of the road and sometimes making the road impassable, even outside of peak tourism periods. Leaders should not rely on being able to meet teams here.
- Teams should not use the road to get between Glenbrittle campsite (NG 412 204) and the Fairy pools carpark (NG 425 261). An off-road route is possible by crossing the bridge at Bualintur (NG 408 210) then following forest tracks up to the Fairy pool carpark.
- In bad weather the streams crossing the path along the north edge of Loch Sligachan can present a significant hazard and prevent progress. Teams should make alternative bad weather plans that take account of this.
- The Trottenish ridge it is easy walking and within the capabilities of a fit and navigationally competent Gold group despite being high level. However, it is exposed to bad weather, so teams must have alternative bad weather plans. The eastern side of the ridge is more suitable for this than the west, due to being more sheltered from prevailing winds, and having more alternative routes.

Way marked and long distance paths

The DofE *Expedition Guide* says "long distance footpaths should not be used, particularly by Silver and Gold teams, except in small sections to link up other paths." (page 10, also see page 39). The quality of way-marked and long distance paths in Scotland varies considerably – some are concepts that don't exist on the ground (for example the Skye and Cape Wrath trails) while others are clearly signposted heavily used routes (for example, the West Highland Way).

In some areas there are no alternatives to some way-marked paths. Teams may use these, but should not plan an expedition with more than half a day continuously on the same route. Heavily used way-marked paths provide little navigational challenge, undermine the sense of isolation, and potentially have negative

environmental impacts, and therefore should be avoided by DofE teams as much as possible. Any such routes in this area have been highlighted in the above advice about route updates.

Scottish Hill Tracks

Scotways, the Scottish rights of way and access society, publishes ***Scottish Hill Tracks***, a book listing rights of way across Scotlands uplands. This is an excellent resource for ideas for routes as some paths are not shown connecting on a map where historic routes exist. Scotways are also interested to hear about any issues with paths and routes.

Core paths

Under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 every local authority and National Park authority (access authority) in Scotland was required to draw up a plan for a system of core paths that gives the public reasonable access throughout their area. Some of these paths do not yet appear on OS maps, and may help DofE teams link up routes. All core paths can be seen **on the SNH website**, with links to details from each council.

Campsites

Serviced sites:

Dunvegan - www.kinloch-campsite.co.uk

Glenbrittle - www.dunvegancastle.com/your-visit/glenbrittle-campsite-cafe/glenbrittle-campsite

Portree - www.portreecampsite.co.uk

Sligachan - www.sligachan.co.uk/camping

Staffin - www.staffincampsite.co.uk

Uig - www.uig-camping-skye.co.uk

Loch Greshornish -

<http://www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk/campsites/uk/isleofskye/portree/skye>

Wild camping

Scottish access rights (see the **Outdoor access code section** for further information) extend to wild Camping for small groups (i.e. individual expedition teams), although the DofE still recommends that, as a courtesy to land owners concerned and to maintain existing good relations, expedition teams inform them of their intentions. It is reasonable for owners to react by saying why a particular site might be unsuitable and to suggest alternatives.

If multiple teams from the same DofE centre intend to camp at the same location, this falls outside the definition of 'Wild camping' permitted under access rights. Therefore, centres planning to camp with multiple teams in the same location should always seek permission from the landowner.

Teams should consult the advice on camping in the *Expedition Guide* (page 101), there are also lots of useful information resources about wild camping;

- **Mountaineering Scotland** has lots of good advice, with links to their minimal impact and 'where to go in the outdoors' leaflets
- **The Outdoor Access Code website** has advice on responsible wild camping, including various information downloads.

Expedition aim ideas

Scottish Wild land areas

The Scottish Government has **defined 42 Wild land areas around Scotland**. The discussions around defining these areas and the implications of this may be of interest for teams considering aims around landuse and wildness.

Hazards

Ticks

Ticks are small, blood sucking creatures found across the uplands of Scotland, especially in areas with lots of deer and sheep. Some ticks carry Lyme disease, which is treatable but can be tricky to diagnose. Teams should be made aware of the risks of Lyme disease and how to reduce the risk of being bitten. All teams should carry a tick remover and check themselves daily.

There are several useful information resources about ticks;

- The organisation Lyme Disease Action has useful downloadable [leaflets about ticks and Lyme disease](#).
- [Stop the tick](#) has lots of of infographics (some a bit graphic, but informational)
- Lyme disease UK has posters and leaflets as part of their [Wake up to Lyme campaign](#), as well as detailed information about the disease

Midges

The biting midge is particularly prolific in parts of Scotland, and worst in late Spring through to early Autumn. The detrimental effect midges can have on an expedition is not proportionate to their tiny size, and should not be underestimated, especially with teams unused to them. During this summer period teams should carry midge nets, insect repellent and clothes to provide full coverage (including gloves and long sleeved tops) and first aid kits should include antihistamines to reduce discomfort. Teams should also be aware of how to reduce their impact including:

- choice of campsite (in direct sunlight and breezy, ideally in both morning and evening)
- choice of clothing (pale, bright, and smooth rather than dark, wooly, or fleecy)
- campcraft (menu planning, positioning of tents, keeping tent doors closed)

Drinking water

Watercourses across Scotland can contain a variety of waterborne infections. Therefore, when wild camping it should not be assumed that streams and rivers are clean sources of drinking water, especially due to the high density of livestock and deer across large areas. Leaders should refer to the DofE *Expedition Guide* advice on taking water from streams (pg 122). Other good sources of information about health and hygiene outdoors (including issues around drinking water) are the NHS advice about [avoiding bugs and germs outdoors](#), and the Mountaineering Scotland advice on [health and hygiene](#).

River crossings

Rivers and streams throughout the area rise quickly after rain, or during snow melt, and careful consideration should be given to any route which involves river crossings. Even small streams can quickly become completely impassable and larger rivers can become very dangerous even if the rain has not been falling in the immediate vicinity of the planned crossing.

All teams should understand what to do in case of streams rising – stream levels will fall as fast as they rise and often waiting overnight is all that is needed. In case of snow melt, peak levels are often late afternoon/evening, and the lowest levels in the morning. Teams planning river crossings must have an alternative plan in the event of continued wet weather.

Hours of daylight

All visitors, especially those from the south, need to be aware of the shortness of daylight hours in the expedition shoulder season; March has 11 hours of daylight and the October half term a little over 9 hours.

Road works

Road closures and works in the area can have a serious impact on the ability of team's and leaders to get to and from expeditions, and for supervisors and assessors getting around due to the lack of quick alternative routes. Information about current or planned noticed road works in Scotland is available at [the Scottish Road Works Register](#)

Emergencies and Incidents

Mountain rescue

In Scotland, responsibility for the provision of rescue facilities rests with the Police Force - who will call out/co-ordinate mountain rescue as appropriate. Teams must be clear that if they need to call for help they must ask for the police, and then ask for mountain rescue. Teams may not be connected to the nearest police control room to their location, so should be clear on the general area they are in, and their exact location. **Scottish mountain rescue** has advice about the process of calling for help, and the information that should be supplied.

Teams must be trained to supply the control room with a six-figure grid-reference for their location, including the two-letter prefix code e.g. NX 345 678 not 345 678. 'GR' is not the correct prefix for any location; it is a commonly used shorthand for 'grid refence'. There is information about six figure grid references **the Ordnance Survey website**. Correct provision of a full six figure grid-reference is essential as the police computer system will not be able to interpret a grid reference without this two-letter prefix. Also, some Network Areas in Scotland have intersections of the letter labelled 100 km² grid squares in their centre, so a mistake may lead to significant delays in support from Mountain Rescue. DofE Scotland strongly recommend that all DofE route cards are prepared including two letter prefixes to avoid delays or uncertainty in emergency situations.

The Mountain Rescue team that covers the expedition area is the **Skye Mountain Rescue Team**.

Remember that in case of an incident both the team's Licenced Organisation and the **Scottish Expedition Network Coordinator** should be notified using the DofE Incident Report Form (available through the resources zone in eDofE).

Mobile signal

It should be noted that in many parts of the area telephone boxes are rare and the mobile phone network reception is limited/non-existent away from centres of population and cannot be relied upon for getting assistance. Therefore, teams must know how to deal with an emergency in a location without mobile phone signal.

Teams should be encouraged to **sign up for the 999 text service** in advance of their expedition to give them the best chance of contacting emergency services in an emergency.

Outdoor access code

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 has been implemented through the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. This provides access rights for the purposes of recreation or education across most of the land and inland water in Scotland. This includes mountains, moorland, woods and forests, grassland, margins of arable crop fields, paths/tracks, rivers and lochs, and the coast. These access rights are balanced with responsibilities towards the environment and the interests of those who make a living from the land.

Three key principles of access

- Take responsibility for your own actions
- Respect the interests of other people
- Care for the environment.
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For further information (including a downloadable e-book) visit **www.outdooraccess-scotland.com**

Any access issues should be reported to the **Scottish Expedition Network Coordinator** who will investigate.

Landuse

The **Countryside Calendar - Year** gives a month by month snapshot of typical activities and happenings in the farming and wildlife year in Scotland, any may be helpful in planning expeditions and thinking about appropriate aims.

Landowners

To identify the borders of estates see **www.whoownsscotland.org.uk**. There is a subscription option which gives access to see contact details.

Lambing

Sheep and lambing season can start as early as February and can continue until the end of May and lambing ewes must not be disturbed. If an apparently 'lost' lamb is seen - do not touch or intervene, as the mother will not be far away. At all other times it is advised that teams should pass through sheep quietly and if possible at a distance in an effort not to disturb and stress them.

Traps

Teams may observe traps on the high moorland. These should not be touched or disturbed as they have been set by the game keepers to catch predators to the ground nesting birds, typically the Hooded Crow.

Scottish game seasons

During the deer stalking season teams should utilise the '[Heading for the Scottish Hills website](#)' in addition to contacting landowners to find out where and when shooting will be taking place. Teams should stay on recognised footpaths whilst in these areas for safety reasons.

Game	Season Opens	Season Closes
Salmon/Sea Trout	Jan/Feb	October (dates vary)
Trout	15th March	6th October
Roe Deer (bucks)	1st April	20th October
Red & Sika Deer (stags)	1st July	20th October
Fallow Deer (bucks)	1st August	30th April
Grouse & Ptarmigan	12th August	10th December
Snipe	12th August	30th January
Black Grouse	20th August	10th December
Wild Fowl	1st September	30th January
Partridge	1st September	31st January
Capercaillie & Woodcock	1st October	30th January
Pheasant	1st October	31st January
Roe Deer (does)	21st October	31st March
Red, Sika, & Fallow Deer (hinds)	21st October	15th February

Bothies

Bothies are basic shelters in the hills. Many are open to the public for use and managed by the [Mountain Bothies Association \(MBA\)](#). If teams plan to use a bothy for lunch or shelter they should be aware of the [MBA's bothy code](#).

DofE teams are generally advised not to camp within close proximity to a bothy without permission from the owner because of problems that come with the pressure of numbers. This often leads to issues with pollution from human waste, so risk assessment would suggest these sites are not appropriate as a campsite. You can find more information about use of Bothies, via the DofE '[Use of Bothies information sheet](#)'

Weather forecasts

- The Met Office provides:
 - [Forecasts with summaries for the region and 7 day detailed forecasts for the chosen town/village.](#)
 - [Surface pressure charts](#)
 - [Mountain area forecasts for the North West Highlands](#). This included a forecast for the region, with forecasts for individual summits available. These summit forecasts are for the summit height of the mountain, which should be considered when teams interpret them.
- [The Mountain Weather Information Service \(MWIS\)](#) provides 72 hour forecasts for 5 Scottish regions. These forecasts are for the summits of the mountains which must be considered when interpreting them for DofE use. They provide some interpretation which can assist participant understanding. The forecast area that covers the expedition area is [North-west highlands](#).

- Outdoor conditions forecasts are available on BBC Radio Scotland (FM: 92.8-94.7, MW: 810) at 18:25 Monday-Friday, and on Saturday and Sunday at 07:00 and 19:00.

DofE resources

The current DofE expedition kit list can be downloaded from:

www.dofeshopping.org/expedition-kit

A range of expedition downloads, such as the Green Form and spare expedition safety cards, can be downloaded from: www.dofe.org/leaders/resources-and-downloads/expedition-downloads/.

Further information of the Expedition section can be found at: www.dofe.org/doing-your-dofe/activities-sections/expedition/