

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 landowners, routes, and campsites:

DofE Scotland
Rosebery House
9 Haymarket Terrace
Edinburgh
EH12 5EZ

T: 0131 343 0920

E: scotland.assessors@dofe.org

Area advisor

We currently do not have an area advisor for Ross and Cromarty.

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Introduction

Ross and Cromarty has scenery to equal any in Scotland. What it lacks is people. Groups carrying out expeditions in this area will find that, whilst no more remote than other areas, it is less populated and much less visited. It is possible to be in splendid isolation only one hour from Inverness. Many of the obvious routes run east to west or vice versa giving groups the opportunity, unavailable in all but one other wild country area, of going from coast to coast! The relative paucity, not just of Award expeditioners, but of hill-walkers generally, compared to the “honey pots” of the south means crowded campsites are a rarity and groups usually have the route to themselves. That of course poses challenges for training and supervision which groups coming to the area must be capable of dealing with.

Though all of Ross and Cromarty is wild country and the Torridon area is really rugged, there are many routes through the region, which are suitable for Bronze and Silver ventures. Circular routes allowing less travel for supervisors are possible. For the really fit and adventurous there are Munros and expansive, trackless areas which present a navigational challenge. Ventures at all levels using the area west of Diabaig can incorporate sections into their expeditions with stunning sea views and the chance to see whales, eagles, pine martins and wild goats.

Area boundaries

The panels' area is bounded on the east and west by the sea. The southern boundary runs in a southwesterly direction from the Cromarty Firth at Beaulieu through Glen Orrin and Loch Monar to Loch Carron at Attadale. The northern boundary runs along the A835, A836 & A837.

The DofE website includes a downloadable **GPX of the area boundaries**.



Choosing Your Route

Access Issues

The descent down **Gleann Bianasdail** (NH 036 690 to NH 012 657) can be tricky so teams should allow plenty of time for this and be used to carrying their bags over rough terrain. The stream crossing at the top (NH 040 694) can present a hazard when in spate. For more advice on see the [River Crossings](#) section.

Lower Diabaig – Alligin Shaus path – the path between NG 798 597 to NG 830 578 is quite steep and exposed in some places, particularly the western end near Lower Diabeg, and may be difficult to find the start of the route as it climbs quite steeply up a stream before traversing around the hill southwards.

Kinlochewe – Coulin path - The path shown on OS maps going south from Kinlochewe to Torran-Cuilinn, by Loch Coulin, passing just west of Carn Dhomhnuill Mhic a' Ghobha, has for the past few years been obscured due to clear felling in the forest. A route is now passable along here, but it varies from the route on the OS map. (May 2016)

The crossing at NH 373 976 on the Allt nan Caisean in **Glen Elg** is a ford and has been reported as a particular issue in rain, swelling to over 3m wide and thigh depth. Alternative routes can be found around this.

Damaged Bridges

The bridges at NH 191 788 and NH 194 791 across the Abhainn Cuileig and Abhainn Droma west of the **Corrieshalloch Gorge** are gone, despite being shown on some maps. (reported January 2015)

The bridge over the Abhainn an t-Strath Chuileannaich at NH 391 960 is no longer there.

Kinloch Damp Bridge at NG 863 471 is shown on some maps, but is not there. This is crossable at low flow, but as broad river which narrows and deepens upstream, it could be a hazard when in spate. Once across the river the path goes close to the curtilage of the house on the south side.

Vehicle access

Strathfarrar has a unique access agreement for vehicles details of which can be found here: <https://www.mountaineering.scot/access/special-arrangements/strathfarrar>

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. **In this area walking, cycling and riding Silver and Gold teams should avoid the use of the Cape Wrath and John O'Groats Trails.**

Scottish Hill Tracks

Scotways, the Scottish rights of way and access society, publishes **Scottish Hill Tracks**, a book listing rights of way across Scotland's 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 **Scottish Natural Heritage website**, with links to details from each council.

Camping

Serviced sites:

Due to site improvements, **Shieldaig Camping and Cabins** (NG 816 542) was closed for tents for the 2019 season, but should be open again for 2020. This site was formerly free, but check in with the new website for any changes.

Broomfield Holiday Park (NH 124 938) West Lane, Ullapool 01854 612664

Black Rock Camping & Caravan Park (NH 604 663) Balconie Street, Evanton 01349 830917

Jubilee Park Site (NH 555 588) Jubilee Park Road, Dingwall 01349 822236

Gairloch Camp Site (NG 797 773) 1 Starth, Gairloch 01445 712373

Sands Holiday Centre (NG759 783) Gairloch 01445 712 152

The Wee Campsite (NG 905 401) Croft Road, Lochcarron 07876 642355

Torrison Campsite (NG 905 557) Torrison 01445 712345. This site is free to use, but supervisors be aware that the do not permit motorhomes, vans or caravans.

Bught Caravan Park (NH 658 438) Inverness 01445 712345

Kinlochewe Caravan Club Site (NH 025 619) Kinlochewe, Achnasheen 01445 760239

Applecross Campsite (NG 711 444) Applecross 01520 744268

Inverewe Gardens Camping and Caravanning Club Site (NG 861 811) Poolewe, Achnasheen 01445 781249

Badrallach Campsite (NH 066 916) Badrallach, Dundonnell 07435 123 190

Wild camping

Scottish access rights (see the **Outdoor Access Code section** for further information) extend to wild camping for small groups (at DofE we consider this to be individual expedition teams). Although not strictly necessary, the DofE recommends that, as a courtesy and to maintain existing good relations, expedition teams inform relevant land owners of their intentions. It is reasonable for owners to react by saying why a particular site might be unsuitable and to suggest alternatives.

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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 is also lots of useful information and resources about wild camping available via [Mountaineering Scotland](#) and [The Outdoor Access Code](#).

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'](#).

Travel and transport to the area

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](#).

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 land use, flora and fauna and wilderness.

Physical and Human Geography

Western Ross and Cromarty (Wester Ross, not to be confused with Westeros!) is typified by its mountainous Highland scenery, especially the Torridon Hills which includes such peaks as Beinn Eighe and Liathach. The highest point in the county is Càrn Eighe at 1,183 m. It contains a long, fractured coastline along The Minch and Inner Sound, consisting of a number of isolated peninsulas split by sea lochs. The eastern half (Easter Ross) is generally flatter, and consists of towns, villages and farmland bordering the Moray Firth.

The main economic activities in Ross and Cromarty are crofting, fishing and tourism. The population as of 2001 was 49,967.

The west coast has high rainfall: an annual average of 50.42 inches (1,281 mm) at Loch Broom and 62 in (1,600 mm) at Strome Ferry, but on the east coast the annual average is only 27 in (690 mm). The average daily maximum temperature for the year is 8.1 °C. Average daily maxima for January and July are 3 °C and 14 °C respectively.

History

Excavations of a rock shelter and shell midden at Sand, near Applecross have shown that the coast was occupied by Mesolithic hunter-gatherers.

It may be doubted whether the Romans ever effected even a temporary settlement in the area of the modern county. In Roman times, and for long afterwards, the land was occupied by Picts. Throughout the next three centuries the natives were continually harassed by Norwegian Viking raiders, of whose presence tokens have survived in several place-names (eg: Dingwall and Tain). At this time the country formed part of the province of Moray, which then extended as far as the Dornoch Firth and the Oykel, and included practically the whole of Ross and Cromarty.

The principal relics of antiquity - mainly stone circles, cairns and forts - appear in the eastern district. A vitrified fort crowns the hill of Knockfarrel in the parish of Fodderty, and there is a circular dun near the village of Lochcarron.

Among old castles are those of Lochslin, said to date from the 13th century, which, though ruinous, possesses two square towers in good preservation; Balone, once a stronghold of the Earls of Ross; the remains of Dingwall Castle, their original seat; and Eilean Donan in Loch Alsh, which was blown up by British warships during the Jacobite rising in 1719.

By the 16th century the whole area of the county was occupied by different clans. The Rosses held what is now Easter Ross; the Munros the small tract around Ben Wyvis, including Dingwall; the Macleods the district between Loch Maree and Loch Torridon; the Macdonalds of Glengarry, Coigach, and the district between Strome Ferry and Kyle of Lochalsh, and the Mackenzies the remainder.

Apart from occasional conflicts between rival clans, the only battles in the county were at Invercarron, at the head of Dornoch Firth, when Montrose was crushed by Colonel Archibald Strachan on 27 April 1650; and at Glenshiel, where the Jacobites, under the Earl of Seaforth, aided by Spaniards, were defeated by a force under the command of General Joseph Wightman on 10 June 1719.

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.

Some useful resources about ticks:

- Lyme Disease Action has useful downloadable [leaflets about ticks and Lyme disease](#).
- [Stop the tick](#) has lots of infographics (some are a bit graphic, but informative)
- 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 disproportionate 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). 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)

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- choice of clothing (pale, bright, and smooth rather than dark, wooly, or fleecy)
- campcraft (menu planning, positioning of tents, keeping tent doors closed)

Snakes

There are Adders (the UK's only venomous snake) in the area. They are not aggressive or commonly seen, but they will bite if stood on, sat on or picked up. Because of this teams who are wild camping should always wear shoes (which the snakes cannot bite through) and not walk around barefoot, in socks or in sandals such as flip-flops. If anyone has the unusual misfortune to be bitten, then medical assistance must be sought urgently.

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.

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. [Mountaineering Scotland](#) 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 reference'. 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. The two letter prefix locates your grid reference within a 100km square; a mistake here may lead to significant delays in support from Mountain Rescue. DofE Scotland

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strongly recommend that all DofE route cards are prepared including two letter prefixes to avoid delays or uncertainty in emergency situations.

The teams that cover the expedition area are Torridon MRT, Dundonnell MRT and Kintail MRT.

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 and 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.

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](#) 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 is usually between around 10th April until around 25th 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

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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

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 Northwest Highlands. This includes 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 that covers the 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.

Useful Links

Listed below are some links you may find useful. Please note that the Ross and Cromarty Expedition Area does not directly endorse any of the sites listed.

<https://visitapplecross.com/> Some useful information for those going to Applecross.

https://en.wikivoyage.org/wiki/Ross_and_Cromarty A travel and tourism site covering the area.

<https://scotland-info.co.uk/wester-ross.htm> A tourist information site with lots of useful advice.

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/