

KNOYDART

A two-day bothy adventure in the wilderness of the Rough Bounds

Overview

The so-called 'Rough Bounds' of Knoydart – often described as Britain's last wilderness – are difficult to reach. Getting to the start of the route involves either a boat trip or long car journey along a winding, 20 mile single-track road. Cut off from the UK road network, the peninsula is a wild place of rugged mountains, remote glens and fjord-like sea lochs. This spectacular area includes three Munros and its coastal views take in Skye and the islands of the Inner Hebrides.

In the 19th century, the peninsula fell victim to the Highland clearances but since 1999, after huge fundraising efforts, the land has been owned and managed by its own small community. Some days you won't bump into another soul in here – although you may spot minke whales, eagles, otters and stags.

Despite its inaccessibility, there are good paths connecting the glens and these provide exceptional running through challenging terrain. This fastpacking circuit is a wonderful way to immerse yourself in the unique landscape.

Highlights

- A truly special wilderness experience in a remote and spectacular location
- A superb route on a legacy network of well-made paths through wild terrain
- Spectacular views of rugged mountain and coastal scenery
- Plentiful wildlife including red deer, otters, pine martens and birds of prey such as golden eagles
- An overnight stay or wild camp at Sourlies bothy
- Fantastic running, descending off the passes and along loch-side paths.

Top tips

- Be prepared for a serious run in a remote area with limited escape options. You will be a long way from help if you have an accident; therefore you need to be self-sufficient with good wilderness and navigational skills.
- Be aware that this route incorporates indistinct paths, some of which are not shown on any OS maps.
- The route includes crossing the River Carnach twice by fording it and a third time over the Carnoch Bridge. The river is hazardous when in spate and there is risk of death. The river crossings can be avoided by descending to the valley directly from Mam Unndalain (described below).
- Always carry a tent in case the bothy is full or if you're forced to wild camp elsewhere due to unforeseen circumstances. Sourlies and Barrisdale are popular bothies – especially in the summer and at weekends when kayak groups also use them.
- Be prepared for quickly changing weather.
- This route crosses land used for deer stalking; however you should be unaffected if you stick to the paths and avoid causing disturbance. Anyone planning to venture off footpaths should find out from estates if stalking is taking place. Those visited on this route include Kilchoan (www.kilchoan-knoydart.com), Barrisdale (www.barrisdaleestates.com) and Camusrory (general advice for Camusrory may be available from the Knoydart Foundation via www.knoydart-foundation.com).
- If two days is too challenging, consider a three-day fastpack with overnight stays in Sourlies bothy and Inverie, before returning to Kinloch Hourn.
- If necessary, the journey can be broken in either direction by staying at Barrisdale bothy or camping there. Barrisdale bothy has a toilet and a tap.
- Midges can be an issue in the summer months, so carry repellent just in case.

BE AWARE

To get to Sourlies bothy it is necessary to cross the River Carnach at Carnoch, where there is a bridge, and then go around or over the headland to the bothy. Shortly before *Fastpacking* went to print, Carnoch Bridge was condemned as unsafe. It can no longer be used and is in the process of being removed and replaced. Updates on the bridge replacement can be obtained from the Knoydart Foundation at their website www.knoydart-foundation.com, or on their Facebook page.

By Carnoch Bridge, the river can be forded in dry spells in the spring and summer but, on the whole, it is impassable here. People have died trying to ford it and those who dare attempt this need to be fully aware of the risk. If safety is in doubt due to high water levels omit the out-and-back to Sourlies and camp at the Carnoch ruin.

Stage 1 also includes fording the River Carnach twice after descending from Mam Unndalain. When the river is in spate this would be dangerous, with risk of death. Those who follow this route this need to be fully aware of the risk. To avoid the river crossings, follow the alternative route (described below) that descends directly to the valley from Mam Unndalain.

Alternative fastpacking route

An excellent alternative two-day fastpacking route would be to run to Inverie over Mam Barrisdale and along the shore of Loch An Dubh-Lochain, then return along the same route the next day (26km each way). There is a pub, accommodation and camping in Inverie, plus Druim bothy at Kilchoan: www.kilchoan-knoidart.com/druim-bothy

Where to find out more

- This is a featured route in Scottish Trail Running by Susie Allison (Pesda Press)
- www.knoidart-foundation.com
- www.visitknoidart.co.uk

STAGE 1

Start: Kinloch Hourn

Finish: Sourlies bothy

Distance: 30km (19 miles)

Total ascent: 1130m (3710ft)

High Point: Mam Unndalain – approximately 540m (1770ft)

Approx. time: 7–10 hrs

Terrain: Good paths – although sometimes rocky, overgrown or boggy – with some faint and pathless sections. Much of the route can be run, but there are sections of muddy, rocky ground, open marsh, potentially hazardous river crossings and steep climbs and descents to contend with.

Maps: OS Explorer 413 Knoidart, Loch Hourn & Loch Duich or Landranger 33 Loch Alsh, Glen Shiel & Loch Hourn

Navigation: Straightforward apart from some tricky route finding near Lochan nam Breac on trackless terrain. An alternative route (avoiding river crossings) that descends from Mam Unndalain is on steep and trackless slopes.

Where to stay: For the night before starting the route, options are to stay in a guesthouse in Invergarry (requiring a drive to the start) or at the B&B at Kinloch Hourn www.kinlochhourn.com. It is also possible to camp at Kinloch Hourn and cars can be left there. At the end of Stage 1, it's an overnight stay at Sourlies bothy or you can wild camp either at Sourlies or the ruins at Carnoch.

Supplies: None on route

Stage 1 Route

From Kinloch Hourn the route takes an undulating path to Barrisdale Bay before climbing up through Gleann Unndalain to the pass of Mam Unndalain and then dropping towards Lochan nam Breac. Just before reaching the lochan (around NM 909 998) you leave the main path on a very indistinct path that doubles back along the nearside of a narrow boggy valley (however the path junction is not obvious and this indistinct path is not marked on the OS map). It is very easy to overshoot here and drop down to the lochan by mistake. At the end of the valley drop down to cross the river on boulders (care needed) and climb the far bank to join a path that contours above the gorge before again dropping down to ford the river again. The route now follows the River Carnach out to Loch Nevis. Cross the river (see top tips) at the footbridge at Carnoch and then, depending on the tide, either go around or over the headland to Sourlies.

Alternative route from Mam Unndalain

To avoid fording the River Carnach twice, it is possible to descend from Mam Unndalain (around NG 896 004) directly down the mountainside to join the path alongside the River Carnach that heads out to Loch Nevis (see alternative route marked in blue). This descent route is trackless and very steep and care is needed. It is not shown on the OS map.

This alternative route is also shown in Iain Harper's *Walking the Cape Wrath Trail*, Cicerone Press, second edition (reprinted with updates 2017), p54. However in there the route is described in reverse as an ascent to Mam Unndalain.

STAGE 2

Start: Sourlies Bothy

Finish: Kinloch Hourn

Distance: 30km (19 miles)

Total ascent: 1490m (4890ft)

High Point: Mam Meadail – approximately 540m (1770ft)

Approx. time: 7–10 hrs

Terrain: Good paths – although sometimes rocky, overgrown or boggy – with some faint and pathless sections. Much of the route can be run, however there are sections of muddy, rocky ground, open marsh, potentially hazardous river crossings and steep climbs and descents to contend with.

Maps: OS Explorer 413 Knoydart, Loch Hourn & Loch Duich or Landranger 33 Loch Alsh, Glen Shiel & Loch Hourn

Navigation: Straight forward

Supplies: None on route, however Inverie is an hour's walk from Kilchoan where there is a shop, cafes and a pub.

Stage 2 Route

From the bothy, retrace your steps to Carnoch. From behind the Carnoch ruins, climb to the pass (Mam Meadail) between Meall Bhasiter and Sgurr Sgeithe for a fabulous descent through Gleann Meadail to join the Inverie–Barrisdale track. This carries you over Mam Barrisdale and back to Barrisdale Bay, from where you retrace your steps to the start.



