

# In brief

**Category:** Moderate

**Map Reference:** OS Landranger Map 31 (Barra & South Uist): OS Explorer (Map 452 Barra & Vatersay)

**Start and End Grid Reference:**  
NL666 983

**Cycling Distance:** 9.5 km / 5.9 miles

**Time:** 2 hours with stops



[www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk](http://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk)



**Cycling is a great way to discover our islands and enjoy the outdoors. With routes to suit all ages and abilities, and minimal traffic on many island roads, cycling can be as leisurely or as challenging as you choose.**

If you don't own a bike, a number of establishments offer bike hire – check out [www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk](http://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk) for more details



You can also explore the islands by following the Hebridean Way Walking and Cycling Routes

[www.hebrideanway.co.uk](http://www.hebrideanway.co.uk)

Entrance to Easdail



## Courteous and Safe Cycling

Most of the vehicles that pass you on your bike are going about their daily business, so we would ask you to respect these few guidelines to keep everyone safe and moving with ease:

- There are some roads that are single track with passing places. Please cycle in single file and keep to the left.
- Use passing places to allow cars behind to overtake and to allow cars coming towards you to keep moving.
- Do not block passing places – leave them clear to allow traffic to keep flowing.
- If you have to leave your bicycle, leave it off road and not in the way of other road users.

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War Memorial



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There are a couple of steep climbs, but otherwise the landscape is reasonably flat. If you have time, you can explore Vatersay and during the summer, there are refreshments available in the community hall - approximately 2.7 miles further along.

## Castlebay: the Castle in the Bay

**1** Start at the Tourist Office on Main Street in Castlebay and follow the road down to the ferry terminal. As you stand on the pier, you cannot miss Kisimul Castle, perched on its rocky base. Built in medieval times, perhaps as early as the 11th century, it controlled what is the southernmost sheltered anchorage in the Outer Hebrides. For many generations it was the home of the legendary MacNeils of Barra, renowned for their

seafaring. After the 1745 rebellion, they moved to Barra and eventually sold the castle. The stones were pillaged for ships' ballast, and it was not until the 1930s that excavation, and eventual restoration, took place after repurchase by the then Clan Chief.

It is well worth a visit (the castle is open in summer, courtesy of Historic Scotland) to see the tide cleaned toilets and marvel at its seeming impregnability. It even has its own fresh water springs and fish traps.

View from Causeway



## War Memorial

**3** The War Memorial is at the top of the hill and has a welcome seat and terrific viewpoint. This is a relatively recent war memorial, dedicated in 1993, which commemorates the men of Barra and Vatersay who died in the two World Wars (71 in the first, 44 in the second). Most were in the Royal or Merchant Navy.

From here, it is possible to see what a marvellous sheltered harbour Castlebay is. It is hard to imagine today, but in the late

nineteenth century, there were hundreds of boats fishing from Barra, mainly for herring. It was supposedly possible to cross the bay from Barra to Vatersay, from boat to boat, without getting your feet wet!

Thousands of people would arrive for the short season to work - gutting, salting and packing the fish. There is still a fishing industry in Barra, but the larger boats work out of Northbay on the east coast where there is a fish processing factory.

Oyster Catcher



## Ancient Settlement

**5** As you enjoy freewheeling down the hill, look out for the site of Allt Easdail on the right, shown on maps as Allt Chrysal. It is easy to miss, as it is not signposted at the road. If you get to the causeway, you have gone too far, so look again on the way back. The site was only discovered when the road was being built in 1990. The crew were looking for a place for their portakabins and it was

realised that the best spot had been used before! There is evidence of occupation from Neolithic times up to the nineteenth century. At different times, there have been circular huts, an Iron Age house, a roundhouse, a wheelhouse, a burial cairn and the relatively more modern black house. Each period of occupation re-used materials from previous ones. There are also "lazy beds", where crops were grown. Go up to the site to see the information boards and historic remains.

## Vatersay

**5** Cross the causeway to touch the island. If you are lucky, you will be greeted by the Vatersay chickens. Look out for sea birds and otters on the shore.

This area of Vatersay is called Caolis, ("sound of water"), after the narrow gap separating it from Barra. Until 1990, when the causeway was built, you could only get to Vatersay by boat. The crossing was not easy: isolation had led to the island's population halving in the previous six

years, and in 1986 a prize bull called Bernie died whilst swimming the sound.

In the summer you may see Bonnie Prince Charlie's Flower (sea bindweed), found in Scotland only on Vatersay and Eriskay. Legend has it that the Prince brought the seeds from France.

Once you have explored Vatersay, return by the same route. The tug up the hill is easier from this direction and the return views of the bay are tremendous.

Castlebay



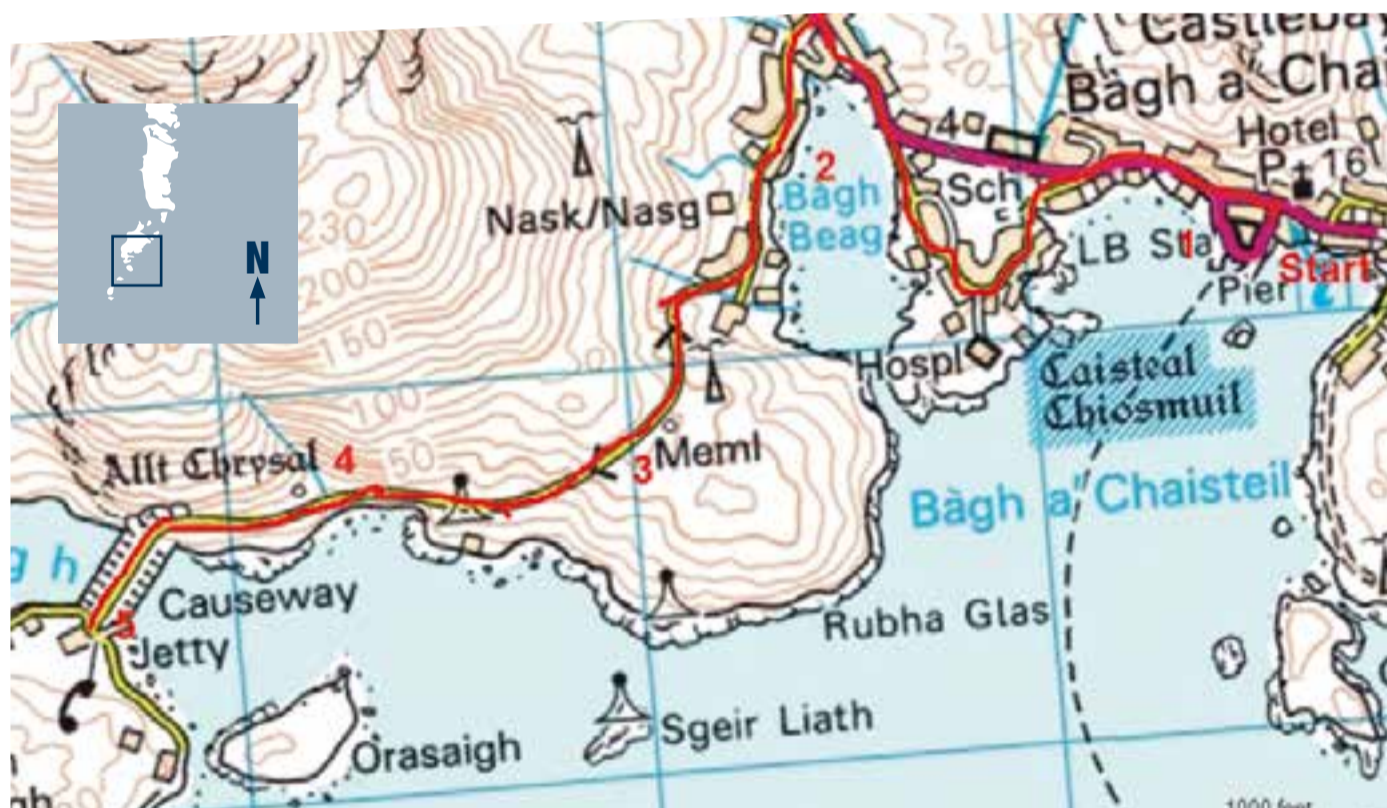
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## Out of Town to the Hebridean Way

**2** Head back up to the main A888. Turn left on the main road and then take the first road on the left signed for Horve and the hospital. This minor road will take you through the settlement of Horve until you again join the main A888. Turn left and continue until you see a road on the left signed for Nasg and Bhatarsaigh (Vatersay). Turn left here. The route is now straightforward and will

take you all the way to Vatersay without further turnings.

You are now cycling on part of the Hebridean Way Cycling Route (NCN Route 780) which runs from Vatersay to the Butt of Lewis. From Nasg, you have wonderful views over the small, enclosed Bagh Beag and can enjoy a stunning sunrise if you are there at the right time. You will soon pass through Nasg and start to climb up round the flanks of Beinn Tangabhal on the road built in 1990 to link with the Vatersay Causeway.



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Beach on Vatersay



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