

# In brief

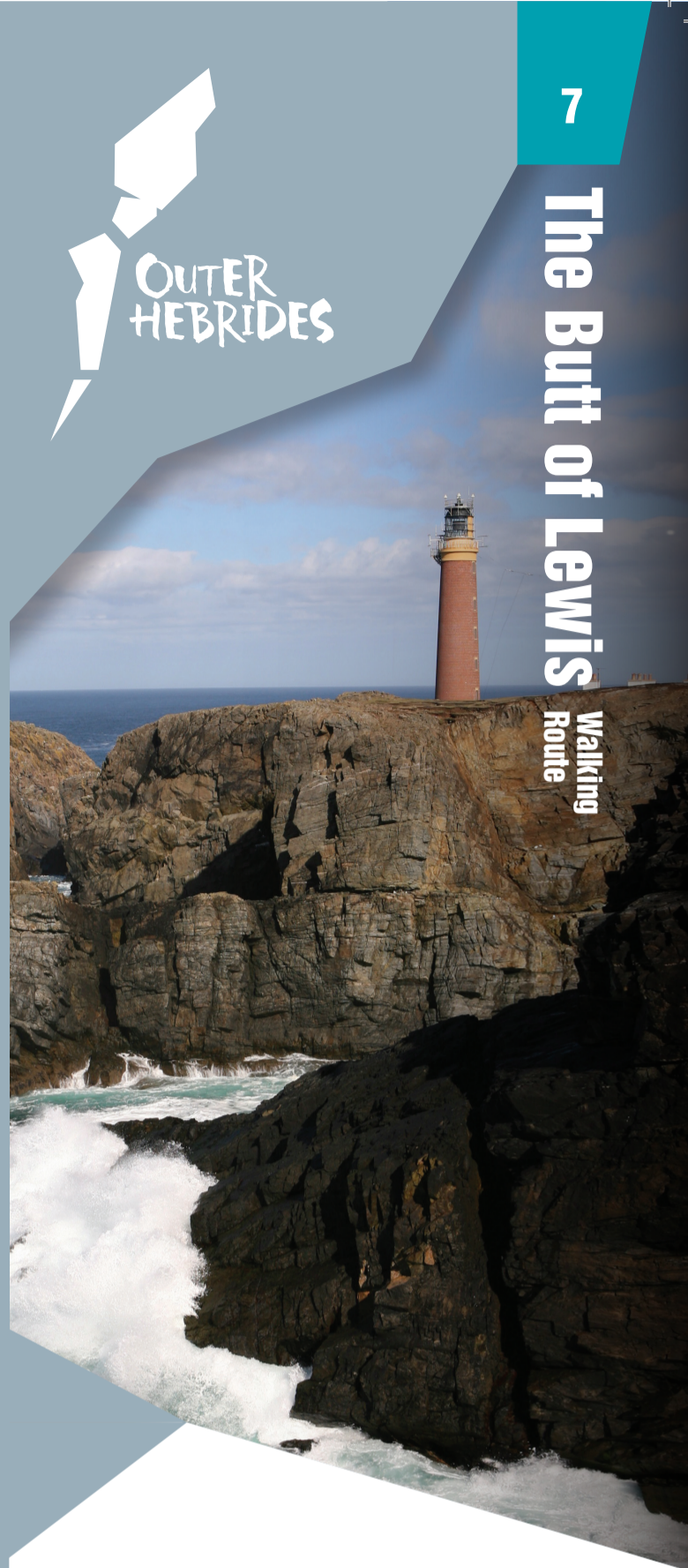
**Category:** Easy

**Map Reference:** OS Landranger Map 8 (Stornoway and North Lewis); OS Explorer Map 460 (North Lewis)

**Start and End Grid Reference:** NB 518 648

**Walking Distance:** 5.5 km / 3.5 miles

**Time:** 2 hours



Walking Route



Our walking and cycling routes are part of a series of self-guided trails through the Outer Hebrides. For more information scan here.



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

- Do not disturb livestock or wildlife.
- Keep dogs under control, especially at lambing time.
- Leave gates as you found them.
- Take all your litter home.

If you keep to the following guidelines you won't go far wrong:

**Scottish Outdoor Access Code**  
 In Scotland we have some of the best access laws in the world – we have the right to walk on most land provided we behave responsibly and respect the rights of others. Full information on access rights and responsibilities can be found at [www.outdooraccess-scotland.com](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com)

- Check the weather forecast before you set out.
- Take appropriate clothing – these walks may cover some rough, wet ground, so wear your boots. A jacket is always advisable.
- Take extra care as some of these walks are along steep cliffs. This walk is not for windy days!
- Carry water and a bite to eat.
- Always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to be back.
- Always bring a compass and map with you.

## Outdoor Safety

Staying safe whilst walking is mostly a matter of common sense:

“Lewis is blessed with some of the finest coastal walking in Britain, with countless sandy beaches and mile after mile of impressive sea cliffs. This short route combines both and also provides a good chance to spot whales, dolphins and basking sharks on calm days.”



For more information and to download other walking routes, visit: [www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk](http://www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk)



The Outer Hebrides offer great opportunities to explore the outdoors and walking provides you with the chance to get close to the nature, history and heritage of our islands or just to get out and enjoy the fresh air. There are lots of different types of walks to choose from including coastal walks and wildlife walks. History lovers can choose – for example – to walk the Bonnie Prince Charlie trail in Uist, while a selection of hiking trails take in historic sites and monuments providing ample points of interest. Whether you are looking for leisurely strolls along island beaches, or challenging hikes through rugged mountain terrain, walking on our islands gives you a chance to really connect with the outdoors and keep fit at the same time.

## The Route

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This short route combines both and also provides a good chance to spot whales, dolphins and basking sharks on calm days.

Much of the walking is on short cropped turf above the cliff tops. Although relatively dry by island standards, there is usually the odd muddy section along the way, so boots are advisable. There is not much of a path but occasional wooden marker posts show the route.

**Note: this walk follows the edge of high sea cliffs – Please take care at all times! It is not suitable on windy days and it is not suitable for vertigo sufferers!**

### The Cunndal Memorial

**1** Park at Eoropie Play Park, then go through a small gate and take the grassy path towards the beach (Tràigh Shanddaigh). Surfers can often be seen riding the waves here; the Atlantic coast of Lewis is now recognised as one of Britain's best (if coldest!) surfing destinations.

If you are here in summer, look out for bumblebees. This is a hotspot for the Great Yellow Bumblebee,

once widespread throughout Britain but nowadays restricted almost entirely to the flower rich machair meadows of the Hebrides.

Instead of dropping down to the attractive sandy beach, go through another gate on your right and head up towards an obvious cairn. This is a memorial to the men lost here on 5th March 1885, when the local fishing fleet was caught in a terrible gale. Two boats attempted to seek shelter at Cunndal, just north of this point. Both boats and twelve men – all from Eoropie – were lost.

### Eoropie Beach



### Machair

**2** Continue northwards, following wooden marker posts through the machair. This exceptionally rare habitat is almost entirely confined to the Hebrides and north west Scotland. It is formed when sand from nearby beaches blows onto peat soils. Tiny fragments of seashells in the sand add calcium to the barren, acidic peat soils, resulting in lush fertile strips around our coastlines which have long been used for growing crops and grazing livestock.

Cross the machair until you reach a small slipway. This is Cunndal itself, the slipway tucked in behind a small projecting reef, offering a rare spot of shelter on an otherwise wild and exposed coastline. Head right for a short distance, cross a small burn, then pass through a gate onto the hillside beyond. Now it is a case of simply following the coastline as you make your way around the headland. There are numerous small promontories here that can be explored if you have the time, or you can take the more direct route waymarked by the wooden posts.



### The Pygmy Isle

**3** As you walk along the clifftops take care not to get too close to the edge – some sections are unstable and prone to collapse. After a while you will notice an area of lush, tussocky vegetation that stands in sharp contrast to the close cropped grass you are walking on. Approach this, and the reason for the lack of grazing becomes obvious – what appears at first sight to be part of the headland is actually a sea stack that has become separated from the main cliff.

This is Luchruban – for hundreds of years thought to be inhabited by pygmies. Regular finds of peculiar small bones by intrepid visitors to the island seemed to support this peculiar legend – until eminent natural historians identified the remains as those of seabirds and small mammals. Tradition has it that the island was the site of an ancient chapel and the remains of a building still exist close to its highest point. Luchruban may well have been an early Christian hermitage.



### Plasticene Rocks

**4** Near the Butt of Lewis Lighthouse, the cliffs grow more and more spectacular. The Lewisian gneiss found throughout the Outer Hebrides is incredibly ancient – some outcrops are over 3 billion years old. Over huge spans of geological time the rocks at the Butt of Lewis have been crushed, twisted and contorted until today they appear like layers of squashed plasticene.

As you make your way along the clifftops, gannets can be seen offshore.

These beautiful and startlingly white sea birds glide effortlessly over the waves, diving into the sea like streamlined darts after passing fish. Tens of thousands breed on the deserted islands of North Rona and Sula Sgeir, some forty miles north of here.

From mid-summer onwards dolphins and minke whales are regularly sighted along this coastline. Look out, too, for the astonishingly bold rabbits that live here who think nothing of running at full speed down terrifyingly steep rock slabs amongst the sea cliffs.

### Lighthouses and Lazybeds

**5** Pause a while at the famous red brick lighthouse – built by the prolific Stevenson family in 1862 – and on a breezy day admire the views out to sea. The waves here at the northern tip of Lewis are often random and treacherous, tides and currents intermingling after travelling up each side of the island.

Heading back along the road notice the long, parallel ridges in the grassy fields on your right. These are feannagan or

lazybeds – old cultivation ridges where crofters grew their oats, barley and potatoes. Listen out for corncrakes as you continue along the road. Their distinctive rasping call is easy to hear, but these plump summer visitors skulk in long grass and are almost impossible to spot.

Take a few minutes to walk to St. Moluag's chapel before heading back to your car. One of the earliest Christian sites on the island, this lovingly restored stone building was a famous pilgrimage site in the 16th Century for the sick and insane.



**“The Machair is an exceptionally rare habitat that is almost entirely confined to the Hebrides and north west Scotland.”**



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