

# In brief

**Category:** Moderate

**Map Reference:** OS Landranger Map 13 (West Lewis & North Harris); OS Explorer Map 456 (North Harris & Loch Seaforth)

**Start and End Grid Reference:**  
NA 992 121

**Walking Distance:** 8 km / 5 miles

**Time:** 3 – 4 hours with stops



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)



**Our islands offer great opportunities to explore the outdoors, with walks providing you with the chance to get close to nature, history and heritage of our islands or just to get out, enjoy the fresh air and get fit.**

Choose coastal walks around the Outer Hebrides or opt for wildlife walks, such as hiking through the nature reserves or walks to spot eagles, deer and other exciting island inhabitants.

History lovers can choose to walk the Bonnie Prince Charlie trail in Uist whole or part, while a selection of hiking trails take in historic sites and monuments providing ample points of interest along the way.

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.

## Outdoor Safety

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

- 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.

## 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)

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

- 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.

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Looking towards Scarp



For more information and to download other walking routes, visit:

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

# The Route

This spectacular coastal hike at the south west corner of North Harris must surely rank as one of the finest in Scotland.

Flower filled meadows, turquoise seas, huge deserted beaches, wild mountain landscapes, dramatic off-shore islands and a good chance of spotting eagles - this is a great walk to do over and over again!

The initial section can be a little awkward – a short but steep climb then an equally steep descent down a rocky and badly eroded path – but after this, the terrain becomes much easier. Navigation is fairly straightforward but basic map reading skills are essential as there is no obvious path at times.

## The Abandoned Island

1 At Huisinis, parking is available by a small toilet block or a little further on, at the end of a sandy track through the grassy machair fields. From the second car park, head east across the flower studded machair and pass through a couple of gates. You will soon join an obvious path heading north east along the rocky coastline. The path quickly starts to climb, zig-zagging up a steep slope, and after 10 minutes you will reach the

high point. Stop at the cairn and recover your breath, admiring the tremendous view across to the island of Scarp.

Home to 213 people in 1881, its population declined during the 20th Century and the last residents moved to mainland Harris in 1971. Like St. Kilda, Scarp had its own parliament, with the menfolk meeting every morning at the ruins of an old house to agree what work was to be done that day. Whilst the men chatted, the women – of course – were hard at work!

Huisinis



## The Rocket Post

2 Descend the track, admiring the impressive stone revetments as it crosses a small burn. Take care for the next 200m – the path is steep and badly eroded and some of the steps can be awkward. There are lots of small paths branching off this section – always choose the lower option and you won't go far wrong. When the path becomes fainter, continue diagonally downhill aiming for the two old stone gate posts visible in the distance. Pass these and continue down

onto Tràigh Mheilein. At first sight, this appears to be a modest sandy beach but as you walk round the corner it reveals itself to be a magnificent golden strand – ranking with Sutherland's famous Sandwood Bay as one of the finest beaches in Scotland that is not accessible by car.

The beach was the site of the famous Rocket Post experiment in 1934, when German inventor Gerhard Zucker attempted unsuccessfully to launch letters across the Sound to Scarp, with explosive results.



## Sand Bars & Fjords

3 Follow the beach, watching the gannets as they dive for fish in the shallow waters. At low tide an obvious bar of sand is visible stretching from Tràigh Mheilein out towards Scarp. This is a tombolo, formed when tidal currents flowing in opposite directions around Scarp meet and cancel each other out, depositing large quantities of suspended sand.

From the north end of the beach there is no path but the route is straightforward. Climb

the grassy slopes of Meilein – the small hill on your right – admiring the views up the fjord-like trench of Loch Rèasort. Donald John MacLeod, who was born on Scarp, recalls islanders sailing out at night to illegally net a few salmon for the pot, cutting the outboard at the head of Loch Rèasort so that the estate's keepers would not hear the noise of the engine.

To the north, the houses of Mealasta on Lewis can clearly be seen – a short hop by boat, but a 2 hour drive by road.



## Crabhadal

4 As you reach the top of Meilein – a mighty 77m above sea level – the freshwater Loch na Cleabhaig comes into view, complete with a beautiful whitewashed cottage that nestles on its northern shore under imposing rocky crags. Like the houses on Scarp, the cottage is these days occupied only in the summer months.

There is still no path, so make your way down the hillside heading roughly south east and pass the eastern shore of Loch na Cleabhaig. Cross the

extensive 'lazybeds' – old cultivation ridges where islanders used to grow oats, barley and potatoes – and descend onto Crabhadal beach. Much smaller than Tràigh Mheilein, this sandy little bay has a wonderful feeling of remoteness and solitude. Salmon and sea trout can often be seen here close to the shore.

After relaxing in this idyllic spot, it is time to start making your way back. Return to Loch na Cleabhaig, pass the little cottage and pick up a small path along the south shore.

## The View to St. Kilda

5 The path besides the loch is muddy and awkward. At its west end the path disappears, so head steeply up the hillside for 10 – 15 minutes, aiming for an obvious gap on the skyline. Go through this little pass (or bealach in Gaelic), then descend part-way down the other side until a large rock marks a small path branching off to the left. Make sure you admire the views out to sea from this point. Beyond the south end of Scarp lies the obvious rocky island of Gàisgeir. If the day is clear,

directly behind Gàisgeir, you may just be able to make out the distinctive outline of St. Kilda which lies 55 miles to the west.

Turn left onto the small path and follow this as it contours along the hillside until it joins the path you followed on the way out. Retrace your route back to the start then if time allows, treat yourself to a paddle at Huisinis's gorgeous sandy beach.



**"Follow the beach, watching the gannets as they dive for fish in the shallow waters."**

Crabhadal



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