In brief

Total Distance: 185 miles (297km)

Distance by Islands:

1. Vatersay and Barra: 13 miles (21km)
   Category: Easy

2. Eriskay and South Uist: 32 miles (50km)
   Category: Easy

3. Benbecula and Grimsay: 13 miles (21km)
   Category: Easy

4. North Uist and Berneray: 32 miles (51km)
   Category: Easy/Moderate

5. Harris: 33 miles (54km)
   Category: Moderate/Difficult

6. Lewis: 62 miles (100km)
   Category: Moderate/Difficult

Suggested schedule

The Hebridean Way is a long-distance national cycling route (NCN 780) through the Outer Hebrides. It links some of the best places in Scotland to explore and admire the spectacular natural environment. You can also walk the Hebridean Way using a separate waymarked route. Find out more on the website below.

www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk

The Route

The remote and spectacular islands of the Outer Hebrides have always been attractive to cyclists seeking quiet roads and a different pace of life. As you wind your way past stunning white shell beaches here at the very edge of Europe, stopping occasionally to visit an antiquity or watch eagles soar overhead, you will lose all track of time.

Using ferries and causeways to hop between islands, this popular on-road route begins on the Island of Vatersay at the southern tip of the archipelago and ends 185 miles (297km) later at the Butt of Lewis lighthouse. Following the route is easy as it is signposted as NCN Route 780 all the way. You might want to consult a map to help you plan detours to historic sites and other attractions.

You will encounter awe-inspiring scenery, that subtly changes along the route – one minute riding above turquoise seas and passing flower-strewn machair, then the next, heading inland through rugged hills formed from some of the oldest rock in the world.

There is absolutely no hurry. This is a journey to savour so take it steady using our suggested schedule to plan your ride and make the most of the time you have available.

Courteous and Safe Cycling

Most of the roads that pass you or 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.
- Do not block passing places - leave them clear to allow traffic to keep flowing.
- If you require to leave your bicycle, leave it off road and not in the way of other road users.

Planning your ride

What type of bike?

Any will do as long as it is comfortable, road-worthy and equipped to carry your luggage safely. If you plan to use a mountain bike, fitting lower profile urban tyres will give less rolling resistance and a quieter ride.

Which direction should I ride?

As the prevailing wind is from the south-west, it is best to ride the route northwards from Vatersay to Lewis so you have greater chance of having the wind behind you.

Can I ride it alone?

You can if you have your vehicle on the mainland, you will need to plan how you are going to get here and back. If you have time you could ride back, or alternatively you could use public transport. See our website for further information:

www.hebrideanway.co.uk

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Start point, Vatersay
Rum from South Uist

The route goes right past the RSPB Reserve at Balranald which is renowned for its work in re-establishing the corncrake – a notoriously secretive bird, but you might just be lucky enough to catch a glimpse! On a clear day, you will have a good chance of seeing the famous archipelago of St Kilda in the distance – a World Heritage Site - from further up the road, near Scolpaig Tower.

Bernerary is rich in wildlife and history and with a three mile long sweep of white sand on the west coast, it is an easy island to fall in love with.

The ferry crossing offers a great opportunity to see seals basking on the skerries as well as many different types of sea duck, diver and other birds.

2 Eriskay and South Uist

On the magical island of Eriskay, there is a good community shop and the Am Politician, a pub named after the SS Politician which ran aground offshore in 1941. The road climbs above the beach, where Bonnie Prince Charlie landed on his way to his disastrous defeat at Culloden in the 1745 Rebellion, then passes through the village and over the causeway to South Uist.

The terrain is largely moorland and lochs with hills to the east. The route then heads west towards the machair of the Atlantic coast, before re-joining the main road at Daliburgh. Further north, the route again loops out onto the machair. Back on the main road, the route leads you north through the watery landscape of South Uist.

3 Benbecula and Grimsay

In Gaelic, Benbecula means the ‘mountain of the ford’. Once, crossing to the Uists meant fording the dangerous stretches of sands at low tide, but today the islands are connected by a series of causeways.

Soon after the turning for Balivanich is a museum, housed within the local school. You then reach the machair and the stunning beach at Culla Bay. From Balivanich, the route meets the main road once more.

6 Lewis

Antiquities in Lewis can be found at every turn. First up are the famous Callanish Stones with the nearby visitor centre, which also has a shop and café. Just along the road is Dun Carloway - a broch which is thought to date from the last century BC.

About a mile off-route, you can experience what it was like to live and work in a Hebridean blackhouse at Gearrannan - a style of building which had survived for centuries but almost disappeared in the last half of the 20th century. Brothers David and Thomas Stevenson - of the famous ‘Lighthouse Stevensons’ family - built the red-brick lighthouse that marks the end of the route in 1862. Thomas’s son, Robert Louis Stevenson, wrote the novel ‘Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’.

1 Vatersay and Barra

Before you start your cycle, and if it is clear day, a short walk up the hill beyond the burial ground near the start of the route gives fine views of the now uninhabited Bishops Isles – the most southerly point of the Outer Hebrides.

Barra and Vatersay have everything you could wish for – high hills, white sandy beaches, machair, deeply in cut sea lochs and a castle - all neatly contained within 27 square miles.

In fine weather, the 40 minute ferry ride across the Sound of Barra gives good views of the offshore islands including Eilean Leathan immediately to the south of Eriskay where the ruin of Casteal an Rìobaîd – the home of a notorious pirate, MacNeil - is clearly visible.

5 Harris

You will definitely want to linger a while along the west side of South Harris, both to enjoy the magnificent views out across to Taransay and to drop down onto one of the many sandy beaches for a paddle.

Tarbert is the main port on Harris with plenty of places to enjoy local food, buy world famous Harris Tweed and visit the distillery.

Climbing through the hills of North Harris takes some effort but it’s soon over - the views are superb and there is an exhilarating descent back down to sea level. It is also a good place to look for golden eagles and even white-tailed eagles as they hang and soar along the steep cliffs of Loch Seaforth.

4 North Uist and Berneray

The route goes right past the RSPB Reserve at Barra Head which is renowned for its work in re-establishing the corncrake – a notoriously secretive bird, but you might just be lucky enough to catch a glimpse! On a clear day, you will have a good chance of seeing the famous archipelago of St Kilda in the distance – a World Heritage Site - from further up the road, near Scolpaig Tower.

Bernerary is rich in wildlife and history and with a three mile long sweep of white sand on the west coast, it is an easy island to fall in love with.

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