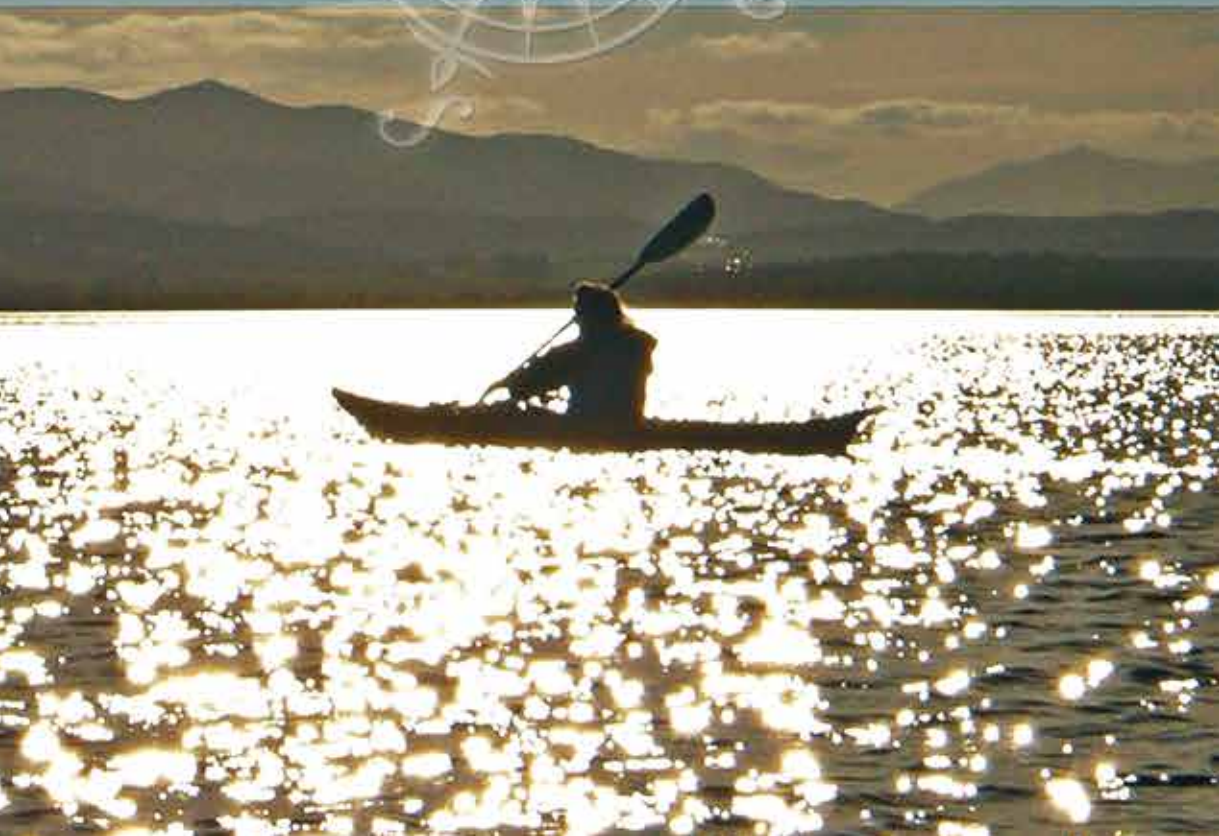


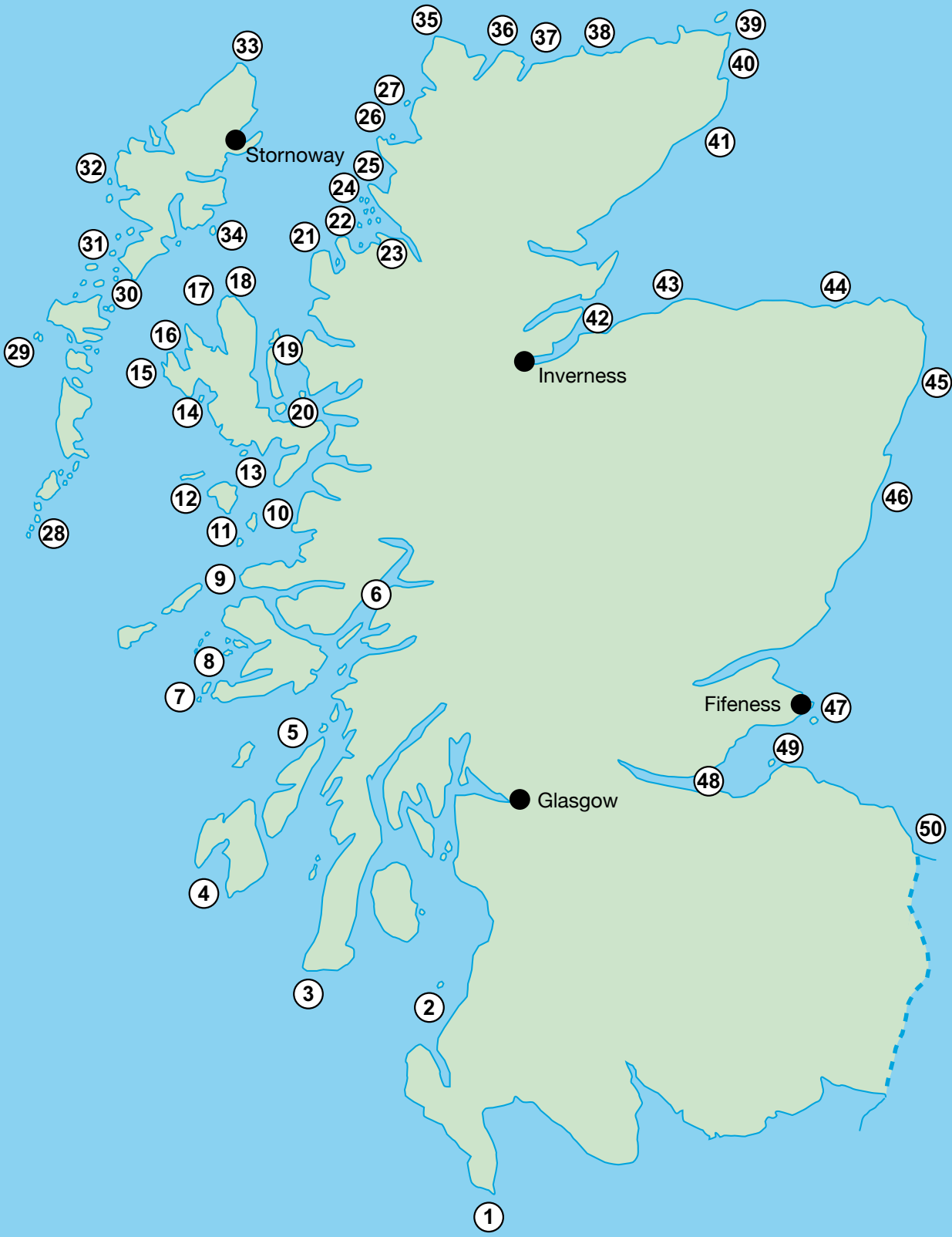
Doug Cooper & George Reid



Scottish Sea Kayaking

FIFTY GREAT SEA KAYAK VOYAGES





Stornoway

Inverness

Fife Ness

Glasgow

Scottish Sea Kayaking

FIFTY GREAT SEA KAYAK VOYAGES

Doug Cooper & George Reid

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Introduction

Scotland has some of the most varied and dramatic coastline in the world. This includes fast tidal streams and calm sea lochs, huge cliffs and sandy beaches, history and culture and an abundance of wildlife. The weather and oceans have been shaping this environment for millions of years and nowadays it offers the last true wilderness of Great Britain. The coastline provides an archipelago of islands guarding the Atlantic coast to the west, remote and dominant cliffs towering above the tidal streams of the north and sea stacks, arches and wildlife fronting the North Sea to the east. The Scottish coastline offers a lifetime of exploration for everyone.

This guide is born from a love of this coastal wilderness, and a desire to discover and explore it. The sea kayak is the perfect craft to journey through this amazing environment at close quarters, and in this gives a unique perspective on the surroundings. The authors have paddled the entire Scottish coastline and have had many years of pleasure in discovering the variety it offers. It is from this experience that fifty sea kayaking trips have been chosen.

The fifty trips described are not necessarily the 'best', but are intended to give a real insight into the variety of kayaking the Scottish coastline offers. The authors are aware that many fantastic areas have been missed out, notably Orkney and Shetland. Our descriptions are not full in each trip and the weather as we know makes the same trip different each time; this should allow the paddler to still have the opportunity to discover things while paddling our trips. In addition to this it is hoped that the trips will provide something for all abilities of sea kayaker, with the trips ranging from sheltered lochs to committing tidal races. The guide is designed to provide all the relevant tidal information and route descriptions to enable the kayaker to head off and enjoy the trip. The kayaker will still need to have the knowledge to interpret this information and use it wisely in the sea environment, taking into account the appropriate safety considerations. The guide is about more than this though; it also provides an insight into the history, culture and wildlife that makes the Scottish coastline that extra bit special. Resulting from years of kayaking, research and personal experiences this guide will provide the true flavour of what makes up Scottish sea kayaking.



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Important Notice

As with many outdoor activities that take place in remote and potentially hostile environments, technical ability, understanding of the environment and good planning are essential. The sea is one of the most committing environments of all, and with this considered it should be treated with the constant respect that it deserves. This guide is designed to provide information that will inspire the sea kayaker to venture into this amazing environment, however it cannot provide the essential ingredients of ability, environmental awareness and good planning. Before venturing out on any of the trips described in this book ensure that your knowledge and ability are appropriate to the seriousness of the trip. If you are unsure, then look for appropriate advice before embarking on the trips described. The book is purely a guide to provide information about the sea kayaking trips. For the additional essential knowledge of safety at sea, personal paddling, environmental considerations and tidal planning the authors recommend gaining the appropriate training from experienced and qualified individuals.

Warning

Sea kayaking is inherently a potentially dangerous sport, and with this considered, users of this guide should take the appropriate precautions before undertaking any of the trips. The information supplied in this book has been well researched, however the authors can take no responsibility if tidal times differ or information supplied is not sufficient. Conditions can change quickly and dramatically on the sea and there is no substitute for personal experience and judgment when kayaking or during the planning stages of a sea trip.

The guide is no substitute for personal ability, personal risk assessment and good judgement. The decision on whether to go out sea kayaking or not, and any consequences arising from that decision, remain yours and yours alone.

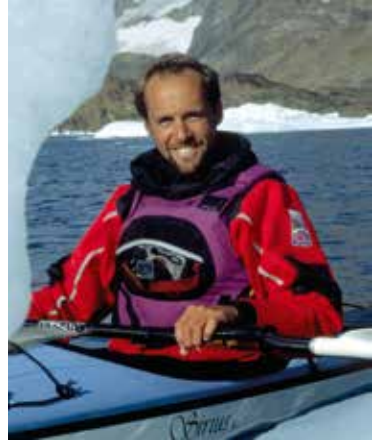
Photographs

All photos by Doug Cooper and George Reid.

About the Authors

Doug Cooper

Doug has spent his entire life involved with the outdoors. At age seven he was introduced to scrambling amongst the Lakeland mountains, and first sat in a kayak at thirteen. Since these early days it has become Doug's career as well as his first love on a day off. Through work and play it has led to expeditions and trips to many of the remoter corners of the world. At present Doug is based at Scotland's National Outdoor Training Centre, Glenmore Lodge. Here Doug is Head of Paddlesports working as a Level 5 Sea and Inland Coach, as well as a Mountain Instructor. It is in this work that he realises his real passion, which is coaching and introducing people to an activity and an environment that has given him so much over the years. Doug has been exploring the Scottish coastline in a sea kayak since 1990 and in this time has grown to love this amazing natural environment. Through work and play he has also sea kayaked many other fantastic areas of the United Kingdom. In addition to this he has enjoyed expeditions to Greenland, Norway and Iceland using the sea kayak to explore the coastlines and cultures. As long as he is in the outdoors coaching, exploring and learning, then there is nowhere else he would rather be.



George Reid

George is known to many outdoor folk through his work with Glenmore Lodge (Scotland's National Outdoor Training Centre) that has spanned a period of 20 years. He became an International Mountain Guide (IFMGA) in 1987, subsequently working in the European Alps and the Canadian Rockies guiding rock and ice climbs, making ascents of Alpine peaks and leading ski mountaineering trips. Despite being introduced to sea and river kayaking at school in Edinburgh during the mid 80's, George focused his attentions on mountaineering. It was not until 1996, when at Glenmore Lodge, that George was exposed to the scope of sea kayaking.



It was his wife Catriona who suggested that George should "join the dots". She bought him a map of Scotland, pencilled in the trips done, and that in turn focussed the weekends and holidays for the next few years until a continuous line appeared on the map around the mainland of Scotland. If there is one thread that links all George's adventures it is an appreciation of nature. His knowledge of the flora and fauna, be it on the mountain or the sea, is well known and one of the greatest pleasures he receives is when he can share these experiences with other people.

How to Use the Guide

To use the guide all that you will need are up-to-date tide timetables of the relevant area, the appropriate Ordnance Survey map and the knowledge to use these. There is also a Trip Planning Route Card at the end of the book that can be used to help plan your chosen trip. There is a full explanation of how to use this alongside the route card. Each of the fifty trip chapters is set out into six sections:

Tidal & Route Information - This is designed as a quick reference for all the 'must know' information on which to plan the trip yourself.

Introduction - This is designed to give the reader a brief overview of what to expect from the trip and wet the appetite.

Description - This provides further detail on the trip including coastline information, launching/landing information, about the wildlife and environment, historical information and the views to expect.

Tide & Weather - Giving further tidal information and how best to plan the trip, taking the tides, weather and local knowledge into consideration.

Map of Route - An outline of the route's start/finish points, landing places, points of interest and tidal information.

Additional Information - Further information that will help complete the trip, or is of interest if in the area.

Using the Tidal & Route Information

Trip name

Trip number

Grade - (Colour scheme indicated)



A- Single day trips from 6 – 20 kilometres in distance. Relatively easy landings with escape routes available. Offering relative shelter from extreme conditions and little affected by ocean swell. Some tidal movement may be found, but easy to predict with no tidal races or overfalls.



B- Mainly day trips from 10 – 30 kilometres in distance. Some awkward landings and sections of coastline with no escape routes should be expected. Tidal movement, tidal races, overfalls, crossings, ocean swell and surf may be found on these trips. They will also be exposed to the weather and associated conditions.



C- Single and multi-day trips from 25 – 93 kilometres in distance. These trips will have difficult landings and will have no escape routes for the majority of the trip. Fast tidal movement, tidal races, overfalls, extended crossings, ocean swell and surf will be found on all these trips. They will be very exposed to the weather and conditions, therefore requiring detailed planning. With this considered they will all require good conditions for the trip to be viable.

Distance - Total distance for trip or for each day on multi-day trips.

Average time - Worked out on 5km/h including stops and some exploration where appropriate.

OS Sheet - Number of Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger map required.

Tidal Port - The port for which tide timetables will be required to work out the tidal streams.

Start - Symbol used on map, name and six-figure grid reference of starting point.

Finish - Symbol used on map, name and six-figure grid reference of finishing point.

HW/LW - The tidal time difference from the tidal port of high water and low water for the local port nearest to the trip.

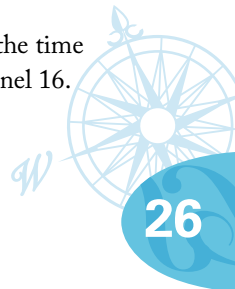
Tidal times - The position of the tidal stream movement: followed by the direction to which the tidal stream flows and the time it starts flowing in relation to the tidal port high water.

Tidal rates - The areas in which the tidal streams are fastest and the speed in knots of the average spring rate.

Coastguard - Name of the relevant Coastguard Station. The telephone number and the time the four-hourly weather forecast starts. Being announced on the VHF radio on Channel 16.

Below is an example:

Point of Stoer



No. 26 | Grade B | 17km | 5 Hours | OS Sheet 15 | Tidal Port Ullapool

Start  Clashnessie (058309)

Finish  Stoer (038283)

HW/LW HW/LW at Lochinver is around 5 minutes before Ullapool.


Tidal times Off the Point of Stoer:
SW stream starts about 5 hrs 10 mins after HW Ullapool.
NE stream starts about 2 hrs 15 mins before HW Ullapool.

Tidal rates The average spring rate here can reach 2.5 knots off the Point of Stoer.

Coastguard Stornoway, tel: 01851 702013, VHF Weather 0910 UT

Point of Stoer

Map Symbols Used

	- Start		- Castle
	- Finish		- Building or Built-up Area
	- Described Route		- Possible Rough Water
	- Landing Place		- Tidal Stream Direction
	- Campsite		- Time in relation to High Water of Tidal Port
	- Lighthouse		- Average Spring Rate
	- Beacon		

Scottish Outdoor Access Code

Access to the outdoors in Scotland is encouraged; visitors and locals have a right of responsible access. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is responsible for promoting and publicising the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC).

Where you have access rights to is not shown on Ordnance Survey maps, or any other map in Scotland. The Scottish Outdoor Access Code deals with the land and freshwater access which is pertinent to the sea kayaker as you have to gain access to the sea over land or down a river and then again land to camp, walk or rest.

You are completely free to kayak on the sea; there is no limit how far offshore you can travel. However, for safety rather than access reasons, the further you travel offshore, during a crossing to an island for example, the more reason there is to contact the Coastguard and let them know your plans.

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code is based on three key principles and these apply equally to the public and to land managers.

Respect the interests of other people

Acting with courtesy, consideration and awareness is very important. If you are exercising access rights, make sure that you respect the privacy, safety and livelihoods of those living or working in the outdoors, and the needs of other people enjoying the outdoors. If you are a land manager, respect people's use of the outdoors and their need for a safe and enjoyable visit.

Care for the environment

If you are exercising access rights, look after the places you visit and enjoy, and leave the land as you find it. If you are a land manager, help maintain the natural and cultural features which make the outdoors attractive to visit and enjoy.

Take responsibility for your own actions

If you are exercising access rights, remember that the outdoors cannot be made risk-free and act with care at all times for your own safety and that of others. If you are a land manager, act with care at all times for people's safety.

Getting more advice and information

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code cannot cover every possible situation, setting or activity. Free information and advice on access rights and responsibilities, and on who to contact in your local authority is available online at www.outdooraccess-scotland.com.



Iona



No. 7 | Grade B | 18km | 5 Hours | OS Sheet 48 | Tidal Port Oban

Start  Kintra (314254)

Finish  Kintra (314254)

HW/LW HW/LW on Iona is about 5 mins before Oban.

Tidal times In the Sound of Iona:

The N going stream starts about 5 hrs and 15 mins after HW Oban.

The S going stream starts about 15 mins before HW Oban.

On the west side of Iona:

The N going stream starts about 6 hrs after HW Oban.

The S going stream starts about 15 minutes before HW Oban.

Tidal rates In the Sound of Iona, the average spring rate is 2.5 knots.

On the west side of Iona, the average spring rate is 1.5 knots.

Coastguard Clyde, tel:01475 729988, VHF Weather 0810 UT

Introduction

This is a trip around a unique island with a special quality that attracts many pilgrims every year.



Iona village



Iona has been steeped in religious history for centuries. Even before St Columba arrived here in the 6th Century and created a monastery there were druids on the island; hence its original name of Innis nan Druinich. But it was Columba the Irish prince who put Iona on the map as a place of Christian learning that was known throughout Europe.

Description

The very quiet surroundings of Kintra provide an ideal place to start this trip, away from the busy Fionnphort.

Head out from Kintra in a WNW direction and cross the north entrance to the Sound of Iona to reach Caolas Annraidh. Out to the north in the distance you might be able to see Staffa, and yet further, slightly to the left, the Treshnish Isles.

The beautiful white sandy beaches at the north end of Iona are backed by lovely machair, a rich pasture nourished by the seashells that have been deposited here over many thousands of years.

This north-west coast of Iona is very quiet, you probably won't see anyone until you reach Camas Cuil an t-Saimh with the golf course behind. South of the Spouting Cave keep an eye out for the semi-precious stone 'Serpentine' which can be found amongst the beach stones along this coast. Serpentine is a lovely green stone that is easy to work with due to its softness.

Port na Curaich on the south coast is recorded as the place where St Columba used to land on Iona when returning from Ireland. About 3kms SW from here is Soa Island, which translates to Sheep Island. Further up the east coast is another stunner of a beach, Traigh Mhor, a fine sheltered spot protected by the string of islets to the south.

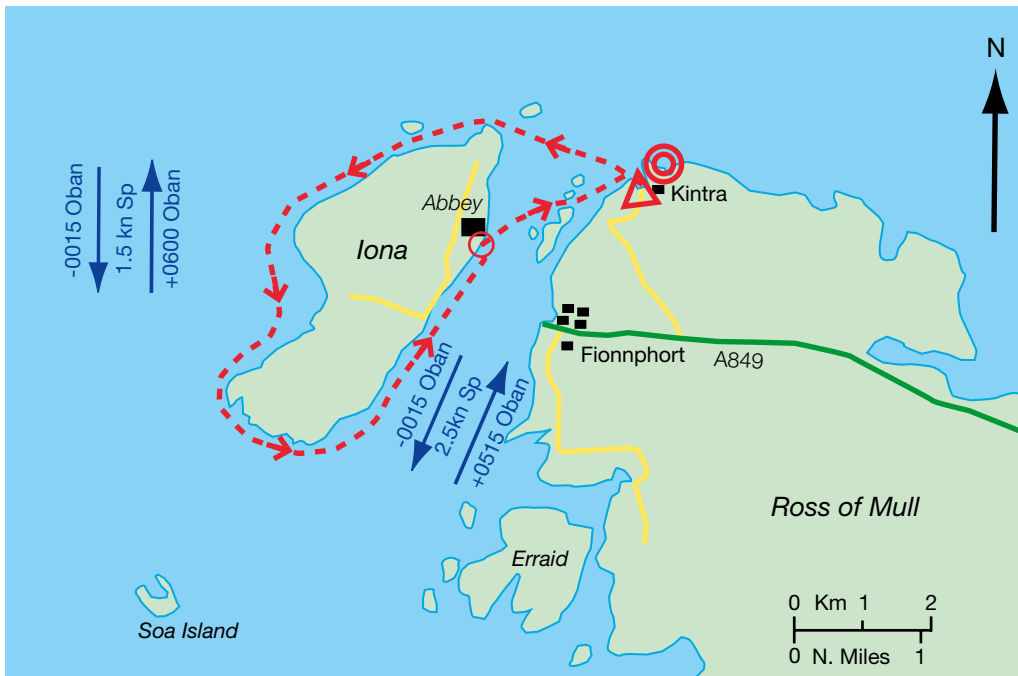
Iona, being at the centre of learning, was the place to be buried if you were a king, 8 Norwegian, 4 Irish and 48 Scottish kings have been buried on Iona. At first thought, with modern day values, it is hard to understand why Iona was so central in years gone by, but just think in terms of sea transport and not road and it is easy to see how it could be a hub used by the Lord of the Isles in the 13th Century.

As with all places of importance many men lost their lives attacking or defending Iona and a short distance before the main jetty at Baile Mor is a small port where 60 to 70 monks were massacred in the distant past.

Visiting the Iona Abbey and the many other sites of interest on the island is most definitely worth doing, but these tourist traps are best visited on a separate trip. The magic qualities of a kayak trip round Iona should be continued undisturbed and passing through the ferry lane and onward to quieter shores will preserve the experience, whereas joining the hoards would potentially ruin an otherwise memorable trip.

Iona itself is a fertile island, due to the different rocks that are its foundation and the covering of shell sand that is rich in calcium, but across the sound on the Ross of Mull the ground is less fertile due to the acidic nature of the granite. The quality of the granite here is so good that it has been used to build lighthouses such as Skerryvore which lies 45km to the west of Iona.

Another plus side is the colour, the granite here is a striking pink. Combine this with the crystal clear waters, blue sky and white sand and you have a wonderful place to paddle through on your return to Kintra.





Abandoned marble quarry



Tide & Weather

The tides are not that strong, but going against the 3rd and 4th hours of the tide in the Sound of Iona could be somewhat tiresome. The south and west coast are exposed to the prevailing winds and swell, and therefore have scope to provide some rough water that might not be that apparent at Kintra where you put in. Plan to be at the south end of Iona when the north-going stream starts at about 5 hours 15 minutes after HW Oban. This will mean that you will have had the luxury of the tide pushing you down the west side of Iona and then when it turns it will convey you northward up the Sound of Iona. Leaving Kintra about 2 hours and 30 minutes earlier would make this possible.

Additional Information

The ferry that crosses from Fionnphort to Iona takes only passengers, no cars. There is also a ferry from here to the island of Staffa.



Cape Wrath

No. 35 | Grade C | Day 1 - 25km/6 hrs | Day 2 - 16km/4 hrs | OS Sheet 9 | Tidal Port Ullapool

- Start** △ Balnakeil (391687)
- Finish** ⊙ Kinlochbervie (217564)
- HW/LW** HW/LW at Kinlochbervie is about 15 minutes after Ullapool.
- Tidal times** From Stac Clo Kearvaig (294736) eastwards:
 The E going stream starts about 2 hrs and 20 mins before HW Ullapool.
 The W going stream starts about 3 hrs and 50 mins after HW Ullapool.
 From Cape Wrath to Stac Clo Kearvaig:
 The E going stream starts about 3 hrs and 50 mins before HW Ullapool.
 The W going stream starts about 2 hrs and 35 mins after HW Ullapool.
 From Cape Wrath down to Eilean an Roin Beag (172583):
 The NE going stream starts about 1 hr and 20 mins before HW Ullapool.
 The SW going stream starts about 4 hrs and 55 mins after HW Ullapool.
- Tidal rates** At Cape Wrath itself, expect rates of up to 5kns. To the east of Cape Wrath, close in to the coast along to Stack Clo Kearvaig the rate is about 3kns. Further east at An Garbh-eilean the rate is also 3kns. To the south of Cape Wrath the rate of the tidal streams are less noticeable.



Kearvaig Bay

Very close in to the cliffs on either side of Cape Wrath there might be noticeable eddies. On the outside of Eilean an Roinn Beag and between it and the mainland there is a noticeable tidal stream, the rate of which is not known.

Coastguard

Aberdeen (for the area E of Cape Wrath), tel:01224 592334, VHF Weather 0730 UT
Stornoway (for the area S of Cape Wrath), tel:01851 702013, VHF Weather 0710 UT

35

Cape Wrath

Introduction

Cape Wrath, the furthest NW point on the Scottish mainland is a wild place. A lighthouse stands on the headland above the caves and arches where the sea swirls and boils as it forces its way around the headland on its journey from the west coast of Scotland to the north coast and back again. The highest sea cliffs on the mainland are here at Clo Mor, 600 vertical feet of unclimbed rock. In amongst this rugged coastline are two beautiful sandy beaches, Kearvaig on the north coast and the very well known, much photographed, Sandwood Bay on the west coast.

Description

Balnakeil Bay is a superb place to start, the wonderfully clean, sandy beach stretches for 2km to the north and the water is crystal clear.

Once on the other side of the bay, the cliff scenery that will dominate this trip begins. When you pass through the gap between An Garbh-eilean and Cleit Dhubh the view to Clo Mor opens up, 3km of sea cliff stretching up to almost 200m in height. At the western end of Clo Mor stands Stac Clo Kearvaig, a popular place for breeding birds such as guillemots and razorbills. The stack

is 40m high and was first climbed in 1989; if you look to the top of the stack you might see some old rope left wrapped around the summit spikes by climbers who descended by abseil.

The sandy beach of Kearvaig is just around the corner and a stop here would be advisable as the next opportunity to land more than likely will be Sandwood Bay. There is an open bothy up behind the beach where, if you so wished, you could spend the night. As well as resting and refuelling here, it provides a good opportunity to time your arrival at Cape Wrath to suit the tidal streams.

About halfway along to Cape Wrath from Kearvaig Bay is the jetty that was used by the Lighthouse Tender MV Pharos. This brought supplies on an annual basis for the lighthouse keepers before it was fully converted to an automatic lighthouse in 1998. This lighthouse, as with many others, is now remotely monitored from the offices of the Northern Lighthouse Board in Edinburgh.

Underneath the headland there is a large arch which, if the sea is not too rough, you will be able to pass through, the roughness in part comes from the fact that there is a tidal stream running through this arch.

A' Chailleach and Am Bodach are sea stacks situated just less than 2km south of Cape Wrath, and both have been ascended by rock climbers. A' Chailleach, 'the old woman', is the impressive slender stack which can only be gained by swimming out to, whereas Am Bodach, 'the old man', can be reached on foot at low water.





The first of the Kervaig stacks

35

Cape Wrath

The coastline continues southward with cliffs less spectacular than those on the north coast, but nonetheless a fine bit of coast. Am Buachaille, the most impressive sea stack on the trip will be seen to the south at the far end of Sandwood Bay.

Getting ashore at Sandwood Bay has got the potential to be exciting if there is a bit of swell running. It might be possible to land in smaller surf toward the top end of the bay close to where the river coming down Strath Chailleach flows into the sea. There is a small flat area at the top of a grassy slope rising above this beach where a tent can be pitched. Water can be taken from a small stream just metres away to the south. If you do land and camp at Sandwood Bay, watch out for the quicksand which is to be found between Sandwood Loch and the sea.

Am Buachaille is accessed by crossing an 8m stretch of water at low tide; once across the climbers have a window of 4 hours in which to climb the 50m stack before it becomes isolated by a large section of water. The coast continues with interest south to Eilean an Roin Mor where, passing through the narrow channel, you might experience the last of the moving water on this trip between it and the mainland. Turning to the north-east once through the channel brings you to a fine sandy beach below the village of Oldshore Beg.

Kinlochbervie is one of the most important white fish ports in Scotland. Rather than going into Loch Bervie with the large pier, land at the head of Loch Clash to the west of the town.

Tide & Weather

This is not a section of coastline to get caught out on. There are few landing spots on this rocky, remote bit of coast. If you do land to escape the sea then it probably will be a fair old hike to reach a road. The headland of Cape Wrath is fully exposed to the Atlantic and rarely will there be a day



Lazy Beds

Quite often when you are travelling along the remoter parts of the west and north of Scotland you will see these parallel ridges and ditches on the hillsides. They are evidence that the thin, wet soils of our rugged coast used to provide people with food. Potatoes, oats or corn would have been cultivated on these ridges. The soil was more often than not very poor in nutrients as well as being shallow. To make a decent bed for the plants to grow, seaweed (as a fertilizer) was laid in strips and then the adjacent turf was laid on top, thereby creating alternating ditches and ridges. The ditches served to allow the excessive rain to drain away, leaving the ridges and the plants less waterlogged than they might otherwise be.

without much swell; whichever direction it comes from it will have an effect on how this trip goes. The ideal conditions would be a very light easterly or north-easterly wind, with no swell running on either coast.

Leaving very early in the morning, if the tides allow, from Balnakeil would provide you with sunlight shining on the cliffs on the way out to Cape Wrath, great for photographs.

Due to the nature of the complicated tidal streams, eddies and the exposure, plan to do this trip during neaps so that, if you end up going against a stream, it should never be that strong.

As a rough guide, if you leave Balnakeil about 1 hour after HW Ullapool, you should reach Cape Wrath as the SW going stream starts at 4 hours and 55 minutes after HW Ullapool.



Cape Wrath

Additional Information

Cape Wrath is a Live Firing Exercise Area for the military. Check with the coastguard, look in local papers, check at the shop in Durness and look to see if any red flags are flying before you set off.

At last, here it is... Scotland's first guidebook for sea kayakers wishing to explore its amazing coastline and magical islands.

It brings together a selection of fifty great sea voyages around the mainland of Scotland, from the Mull of Galloway in the SW to St Abb's Head on the east coast, as well as voyages in the Western Isles, ranging from day trips to three day journeys.

Illustrated with superb colour photographs and useful maps throughout, it is a practical guide to help you select and plan trips. It will provide inspiration for future voyages and a souvenir of journeys undertaken.

As well as providing essential information on where to start and finish, distances, times and tidal information, the book does much to stimulate and inform our interest in the environment we are passing through. It is full of facts and anecdotes about local history, geology, scenery, seabirds and sea mammals.

A fascinating read and an inspirational book.

Scottish Sea Kayaking

FIFTY GREAT SEA KAYAK VOYAGES

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