



The *Ultima Thule* of mainland Britain, this is one of the wildest, barest, rockiest and emptiest of places. Nonetheless, when the sun does shine – which is more often than you might expect – there can be few locations on earth to match its stunning beauty. All around the coast, often bounded by cliffs, are the most spectacular beaches – wide, sweeping arcs of perfect sand, set off by the harshness of the hinterland.

Settlements of any size are limited. Scourie is a former fishing village with a

shop and campsite, Kinlochbervie is a busy port for the landing of white fish, but has only a few houses, whilst Durness on the north coast has become the main centre. Adjacent is Balnakeil, a former RAF base which is now home to a craft village and café.

The furthest corner of all is Cape Wrath, which requires some determination to reach – the journey is by passenger ferry across the Kyle of Durness followed by an 18km minibus ride across the eerie landscape of the Parph.

The Far North West

- 1 Scourie Point** 28
You can almost reach out and touch the lobster and crab pots dotted about the inlets and cliffs here
- 2 Handa Island** 30
Sail out to this gem of an island bird reserve, with fine cliffs, perfect beaches and nesting puffins – but watch out for the dive-bombing bonxies
- 3 Beaches of Oldshoremore Bay** 32
Beach-hop between fabulous and remote bays and coves separated by rocky headlands
- 4 Sandwood Bay** 34
Tramp over the moors to visit this vast and majestic beach, the legendary home of mermaids
- 5 Kyle of Durness** 36
Bask in the views across the narrow waters of the Kyle from hidden sandy beaches along this route
- 6 Faraid Head** 38
Dodge cows grazing for seaweed on the sands or hunt out puffins and seals on this stunning headland
- 7 Smoo Cave** 40
Peer into the darkness of Britain's largest sea cave before setting off across the moors behind Durness
- 8 Ceannabeinne and the Durness Riots** 42
Pay a visit to the site where residents fought back against the Clearances, helping to pave the way towards new land rights for crofters



Beaches of Oldshoremore Bay

Distance 8km **Time** 3 hours 30

Terrain rough coastal walking with some pathless sections and a scramble near the start; good navigational skills needed;

minor road to return **Map** OS Explorer 446

Access schoolbus (169) from Durness and daily bus (806) from Lairg to Kinlochbervie, 3.5km away

This fairly tough coastal walk links some of the most beautiful and isolated sandy beaches in Scotland. The inland return by minor roads passes through tiny crofting communities. On a fine day, some may prefer to be left to enjoy the sand and waves at Oldshoremore.

Oldshoremore is a small community, part of a crofting estate now owned by the conservation charity, the John Muir Trust. In the settlements this walk passes, there are about 100 permanent residents,

although the numbers swell in the summer months. To reach the car park for this walk, follow the signs for Oldshoremore Bay, taking a left turn off Blairmore and Sheigra road to descend steeply towards the shore.

From the car park, go through the gate next to the toilets and climb to the top of the dunes. After another gate, steps lead down onto the superb beach. The fine white sand is a mixture of ground-up shells and the local sandstone; behind the beach it has built up to form a small dune system and area of machair, which is renowned for its display of rare flowers in the spring. Cross to the very far end of the bay – at high tide there is only a narrow strip of sand here. Look for a band of red rock, where a short rough scramble is needed to reach a faint path on the turf above.

Aim for a stile and, once this is crossed,





head diagonally left uphill rather than following the clearer flat path also to the left. The path is only faint as it climbs a grassy gully and then bears west, cutting across the small headland towards Polin Bay. On reaching a fence, stay on the coastal side and accompany it around a corner with a good view of the beach ahead. Carefully step over the fence where there is wood on the top, and follow the cliff path until a point where you can descend easily to the beach at Polin.

After crossing the pristine sands here, look out for the path which starts at a corner fencepost; it quickly becomes more distinct as it climbs steeply. Cross a stile near the top and then keep right on a small path, staying close to the fence. This leads over lumpy ground to Port Chaligaig where a small pier provides evidence of a once important fishing port.

At the bottom, turn right onto the road and then very soon left through a gate for a steep uphill climb on the path. Once the

gradient eases off a bit, keep climbing, remaining fairly close to the sea but safely back from the cliff edge; there are some faint paths. Look out for the impressive sea stacks, standing proud on a wave-cut platform. After a rusty fencepost, the path improves and crosses a flat area of clifftop. Soon, where a stone wall comes into view, aim for the seaward end and cross the stile to enjoy the first view of the sands at Sheigra.

The path follows a wide ledge part way down the cliff to eventually reach the basic camping area at Sheigra. Go through the campsite to head inland on a track, passing the cemetery along the way. Turn right to follow the minor road as it passes the houses dotted amongst the small fields and open grazing land. Ignore the turnings to Port Chaligaig and Polin, finally turning right in Oldshoremore to take the road down to the beach.