

Coigach

Vignette: Coigach, 1974 to 1977
(November 2024)



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Ullapool and beyond

November 2024

Ullapool

Ullapool (/ˈʌləpuːl/^[2]; Scottish Gaelic: *Ulapul* [ˈu̯ɫ̪ap̪h̪u̯ɫ̪]^[3]) is a village and port located in Northern Scotland. Ullapool has a population of approximately 1,500 inhabitants.^{[4][5]} It is located around 45 miles (70 kilometres) northwest of [Inverness](#) in [Ross and Cromarty](#), Scottish Highlands. Despite its modest size, it is the largest settlement for many miles around. It is an important port and tourist destination. The [North Atlantic Drift](#) passes Ullapool, moderating the temperature. A few [Cordyline australis](#) (New Zealand cabbage trees) are grown in the town and are often mistaken for [palm trees](#). The Ullapool River flows through the town, which lies on [Loch Broom](#), on the [A835](#) road from Inverness. It is in the civil parish and community council area of [Lochbroom](#).



(Source: Wikipedia, November 2024)

Stac Pollaidh

Stac Pollaidh (Scottish Gaelic pronunciation: [ˈst̪aːkˠ pˠhɔːt̪ɛɾ]) is a [mountain](#) in the [Northwest Highlands](#) of [Scotland](#). The peak displays a rocky crest of [Torridonian sandstone](#), with many pinnacles and steep [gullies](#). The ridge was exposed to [weathering](#) as a [nunatak](#) above the ice sheet during the last [Ice Age](#), while the ice flow carved and scoured the smooth sides of the mountain.^[1]

The modern Gaelic name is a recent invention. The peak is named on the first edition Ordnance Survey maps simply as "An Stac" (the pinnacle) and on later maps as "Stac Polly". The "Polly" element is of Norse origin, derived from "Pollá" meaning "pool river".^[2] Due to its relatively low height of just over 2,000 feet (610 metres), fine views and ease of access from a road it has become a very popular peak to climb. It also provides some fine [scrambling](#) in the traverse of the summit ridge, including one *bad step* near the final summit. Consequentially it has suffered from a great deal of [erosion](#), leading to [Scottish Natural Heritage](#) constructing a large [path](#).



(Source: Wikipedia, November 2024)

Summer Isles

The Summer Isles (Scottish Gaelic: Na h-Eileanan Samhraidh, pronounced [nə 'helanən 'ʃãũɾɪ] ⓘ) are an archipelago lying in the mouth of Loch Broom, in the Highland region of Scotland.

Geography

Tanera Mòr is the largest island and was the last one to remain inhabited.[1] It was formerly home to an Atlantic salmon fish farm, some rental holiday homes, a café and a post office, which operated its own local post and printed its own stamps from 1970 until 2013, but a new set is planned for 2016.[2][3] The island has no roads, and the only recognisable path goes around the Anchorage, the sheltered bay on the east side of the island. Boats sail to the island from Achiltibuie and Ullapool.[4]



(Source: Wikipedia, November 2024)

Lochinver

Lochinver (Loch an Inbhir in Gaelic) is a village at the head of the sea loch Loch Inver, on the coast in the Assynt district of Sutherland, Highland, Scotland.[2] A few miles north-east is Loch Assynt which is the source of the River Inver which flows into Loch Inver at the village. There are 200 or so lochans in the area, popular with anglers. Lochinver is dominated by the "sugar loaf" shape of Caisteal Liath, the summit peak of nearby Suilven.



(Source: Wikipedia, November 2024)

Suilven

Suilven is a [mountain](#) in [Scotland](#). Lying in a remote area in the west of [Sutherland](#), it rises from a [wilderness](#) landscape of [moorland](#), [bogs](#) and [lochans](#) known as [Inverpolly National Nature Reserve](#). Suilven forms a steep-sided ridge some two kilometres (1+¼ mi) in length. The highest point, Caisteal Liath ("Grey Castle" in [Scottish Gaelic](#)), lies at the northwest end of this ridge. There are two other summits: Meall Meadhonach ("Middle Round Hill") at the central point of the ridge is 723 metres (2,372 ft) high, whilst Meall Beag ("Little Round Hill") lies at the southeastern end.



(Source: Wikipedia, November 2024)

Inverpolly

Mountains of the Coigach (1972)

An untitled and unfinished poem written after the September 1972 holiday in north-western Scotland. I don't remember the exact date of the poem – it was probably written in the summer of 1973, during the farming season just before my departure for Africa. The title was added later:

Mountains of the Coigach

I long to see the morning rise
and spread like silver through the skies;
White water falling from the rocks
and paleness mirrored in the lochs;

And through the myrtle let me tread
to find the mountains clear of cloud;
And see where shapes before my eyes
stand sharp against the sloping skies;

And where the sinking sunlight seeks
the shadows playing on the peaks.
I long for still and sleeping trees,
and evening silence on the seas...

September 1974

On return from Kenya and holiday at Inverpolly

These notes were written in 1977 during my travels through Greece...

On return from Kenya: Virginia, Nick and Eva were there to greet me at Heathrow. I saw Dad in London and reached Mum at home later the same evening – so I saw the whole family the day I returned. Everything was so familiar – it seemed I had not been away for so long. Yet the year itself, with such a fullness of experience had seemed like a lifetime. It was similar to the children [in the CS Lewis books] returning to England after being kings and queens in Narnia. A friend of the family suggested that it depended on one's quality of perception. I would say that and involvement in the situation at hand...

So reads the note written in haste in 1977. But this note does not make any mention of the two weeks spent at Inverpolly in north-west Scotland immediately after returning from Africa. Writing more than 40 years later, my recollections of precise dates and places are somewhat hazy. Not surprisingly, after almost a year of unbroken and detailed diary writing, I gladly relinquished this task as soon as I set foot on British soil. But I seem to remember staying just a day or two at Legbourne, then I recall that my mother and I drove, in the white Renault, to York, where we boarded the overnight train to Inverness, arriving the next morning, with the car being unloaded without incident this time (recalling that in 1972 we were delayed several hours because the car got stuck in the railway van!)

I remember stopping near a river between Inverness and Ullapool, probably for a picnic lunch, and

“revelling in the pastel highland hues after Africa's garish colours”

(to quote from Gavin Maxwell's Ring of Bright Water).

At Inverpolly I spent much time walking in the hills around the valley, praying and thanking God for my year in Kenya, and that he had brought me safely back to Britain. I took the photograph during one of these walks, that shows Inverpolly Lodge, the River and the Bay beyond.

I have rather vague memories of who else was there: Virginia and Fiona feature in the photographs, and Nigel too, and I think Antonia was there too, as Nigel thought she was brave to be walking along the stony Inverpolly beach.

Almost certainly we did a Viking funeral one evening, watching our flaming raft floating out to sea. The Carlisles were there too, I am sure, and I certainly remember Iain describing stag hunting.

On 12 September 1974 the 'Inverpolly Mixed Voices Choir' gave their performance of 'Ach please Mary...', which was composed during several late-night fly-tying sessions. I was not part of this, as I was generally too tired to stay up late and made a point of getting to bed early each night.

On one occasion (perhaps 1977) some of us climbed to the top of one of the nearby hills at sunset, and as it was a clear evening, we could see not only the panorama of famous mountains – Stac Pollaidh, Cul Mhor, Cul Beag, Benn An Eoin, Ben More Coigeach, Suilven and Canisp – but far to the north-west across the sea to 'Paradise', the Outer Hebrides, Lewis and Harris. I took some photographs, and later glued the mountain ones together to form a panorama that would later adorn my desk...

But it was on the second to last day that I realized I was *not* feeling well, and special arrangements had to be made for me to travel back home at a later date, after some extra rest (which meant Virginia had to travel home early, and she was not pleased). This turned out to be the very beginning of my TB, but no one suspected it at the time, putting it down to

'post-Kilimanjaro' exhaustion, or flu. The beauty of north-west Scotland was etched in my mind as some of my last memories of normal life, before experiencing the long and severe illness of TB, which included some 5 weeks in hospital...

Reminiscences inspired by photographs

A few more notes reflecting on the Inverpolly photographs taken in September 1974, just after my return from Kenya...

- There's the classic photo of Uncle Keith, wearing an orange anorak, sitting on a rock in Achnahaird Bay, puffing on his pipe and gazing out to a blue-grey sea with foaming white breakers, under a grey sky.
- Then there's a picture of Nigel and Fiona on the stony Inverpolly beach, with a fire going – another young man, possibly Tim Taylor with a white terrier. Everyone wearing thick jerseys, showing that it was pretty cold. Moors, mountains, sea and mist.
- The familiar shapes of the mountains I came to know and love – Stac Pollaidh, Cul Mhor and Cul Beag, Benn an Eoin, Ben Mor Coigeach. Not many climbed those mountains, but on occasions I did, and so those experiences and memories are special.
- There were only two mountains that I climbed on more than one occasion – Cul Mhor (several times, including in the late 1960s) and Stac Pollaidh. I also climbed Suilven with Brian in 1977, my last trip to Inverpolly.
- Clearly I climbed Stac Pollaidh in 1974, as the album contains several photographs taken from near the summit, including misty ones over Loch Osaig and Loch Bad a' Ghail.

Photographs of Inverpolly, September 1974



Inverpolly Lodge, River and Bay



View looking south towards Stac Pollaidh



Benn an Eoin and Ben Mor Coigeach



Keith, Achnahaird Bay



Fiona, Nigel and Tim, Inverpolly Beach



Coastal view

Photographs of Inverpolly, September 1974 (continued)



Virginia and Fiona at Inverpolly Bay



Sunset from near Inverpolly...



Views from Stac Pollaidh over Loch Osaig and Loch Bad a' Ghail



Towards Inverpolly Bay at dusk

Photographs of Inverpolly, September 1974 (continued)



Suilven beyond Loch Scionascaig



Cul Beag and Stac Pollaidh



Benn an Eoin and Ben Mor Coigach



Suilven over Loch Scionascaig



Cul Mhor



View from Stac Pollaidh



Stac Pollaidh

September 1976

From Delhi to Inverpolly

Monday 6 September 1976 – Rise at 04.00 (I'm used to it now!) Very sad farewells to Cathy and Stephen and the Roemmelses. Endless formalities at Delhi airport, with the plane delayed by two hours (surprise, surprise!) – but the medical students managed to get seats as there were some spare places. Take off at 09.00 and fell asleep until we reached Dubai in the Emirates, where we had to get out of the plane. It was good to set foot on 'Arabian soil' – even though it was airport tarmac. Extremely hot and arid. Changed planes in Damascus, where there was the inevitable two hour wait on the ground. Flew north and east, crossing the coast just south of Turkey and having a really superb view of the eastern end of the Mediterranean, including Beirut, Lebanon. A really sad moment, as this was my last view of the East.

A sudden transformation – some peaks of the Alps (near Kitzbuhel) before descending into Munich – green fields, woods, autobahns, factories, cities. By this time it was dusk (19.00), but as we took off again the sun 'unset' and for a long time remained on the western horizon – sinking very slowly until we reached London. Cruising slowly above the clouds, and then circling over the lights of London, reaching Heathrow at 20:15 local time, though it seemed like 2 o' clock in the morning – Indian time! Customs: I was thoroughly searched for drugs, as I'd come from Delhi. Bus to Kensington, and then caught the Night Scotsman from King's Cross – with a sleeper as far as Edinburgh. It made such a difference being able to make myself understood! Fitful night's sleep and leisurely breakfast at Waverley Station. Morning train to Inverness, connecting beautifully with a bus to Ullapool. Rang Inverpolly, but everyone was out, so I stood on the road and soon a Croft Commission officer going to Lochinver gave me a lift to the front door of Inverpolly Lodge! Mum and Dad were really surprised to see me a day early! By this time it was 18:00 and after six days almost non stop travel from Pokhara, I was absolutely shattered and suffering from jet lag. *[I recall going to bed around 9 pm, and waking up at 4 the following afternoon, having slept solidly for 19 hours!]*

Four words from the Lord (4 – Scotland)

The fourth and final 'word from the Lord' came to me on top of Inverpolly Hill, Scotland:

"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free... So if the Son shall set you free [makes you free], you will be free indeed" (John 8 v 31, 32, 36).

True freedom – from guilt, sin, self, the devil, the world – now freed to serve Christ. The freedom and independence of 'doing His thing'. This freedom is something real and wholesome, and can be experienced afresh every day...

Photographs of Inverpolly, September 1976



Family and friends, Inverpolly Lodge

Photographs of Inverpolly, September 1976 (continued)



Family and friends, Inverpolly Lodge

September 1977

Recollections of my last holiday at Inverpolly, September 1977

It is December 2015, and I am writing up recollections of my last holiday at Inverpolly in north-west Scotland, in September 1977. The date is significant, as this marked the last 'holiday of freedom' before starting full-time employment with my first company, Sir M MacDonald and Partners later that month. And given that in a week's time it will be 2016, and I will be able to say that 'next year' I will have been working for engineering companies for a total of 40 years non-stop, I think that is significant, and this gives impetus to the vision that one day I will set up my own company, Esher Environmental Services Pty Ltd...

The journey to Scotland was effectively the 'maiden voyage' of the blue Skoda that Dad had given me for my 22nd birthday. On the way I stayed with Dave Cameron and friends at his family home in Middlesborough, and I also picked up Brian Thurston and we drove north through Inverness and Ullapool and on to Inverpolly. I remember the holiday as a series of impressions, rather than as a sequence of events, images stimulated no doubt by the few but beautiful photographs shown on the following pages.

The familiar mountains, Cul Mor, Cul Beag, Ben Eoin, Stac Pollaidh and Ben More Coigach, evidently with enough clear weather to photograph them clear of cloud; the lochs and waterfalls, view over the sea at sunset, and the ever-turbulent sea below; Keith with the ghillie with a sea-trout caught in the Polly river; Patrici, Valerie and Brian dodging the waves at Reiff.

On one of the days, Brian and I climbed Suilven, which was a full day's expedition. The weather was perfect, and I remember the long hike through the heather and myrtle to get to the base of the mountain, the steep ascent to the razor-back saddle, the view back to the 'pinnacle' summit at the eastern end, and the climb to the smooth, rounded summit at the western end, where there was grass growing and even a dry stone wall that looked as if it was dividing two sheep fields. On the way down we found a waterfall, and since we were hot, and the weather was good, we flung off our gear and showered in and behind the waterfall and swam in the deep still pool at the waterfall's base...

I recall that on the last day I gazed at the turbulent sea, the melody of a famous piece by Mendelssohn going through my mind, somehow realising that this would be the last time I would see the incredibly beautiful landscapes of north-west of Scotland. That last evening I stayed up late talking with Griselda, and 'setting the world to rights', in front of the fire, with a steaming cup of tea or hot chocolate, or perhaps Scotch whisky on the rocks. We talked about a number of personal things, which was really helpful to me at the time, and this was a conversation I would remember for many years to come, even referring to it in a 'landmark' letter I wrote to Griselda nearly 10 years later during a flight to Darwin...

Photographs of Inverpolly, September 1977



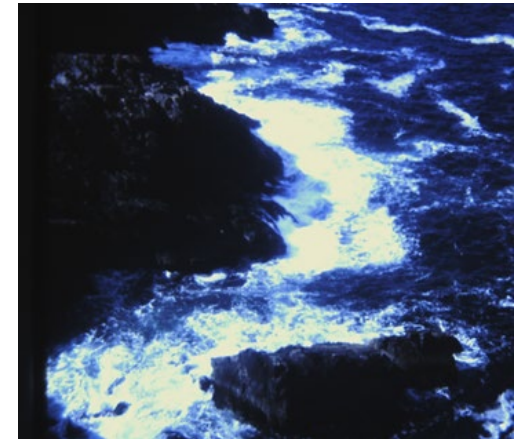
Above: Cul Mor; Below: Keith and the ghillie, Inverpolly Lodge



Above: Ben Eoin and Ben More Coigach; Below: Reiff



Photographs of Inverpolly, September 1977 (continued)



Suilven and Cul Mor



Photographs of Inverpolly, September 1977 (continued)



Expedition to climb Suilven, resting at a waterfall on the way down...



