

Northwest Highlands ~ Monday 11 to Friday 15 May 2009

In the wild land north of Ullapool the rocks are laid bare for all to see, with expanses of sandstone, quartzite and limestone partly covering the ancient gneiss. It's all topped by a huge slab of metamorphic rocks that slid into place along the world-famous 'Moine Thrust'. This was the cradle of modern ideas of mountain building, and now has recognition as Scotland's first Geopark.

This trip will hit the highlights, including Knockan Crag and the limestone valleys of Assynt, giving us a great introduction to the area, its stunning scenery and remarkable rocks. We'll stick to the low level with half-day and longer walks on mountain paths and rough ground.

Outline Programme

Monday 11 May Travel to Ullapool, meet in the late afternoon. Short walk in the evening, up the hill behind Ullapool to discover the different rocks of the area.

Tuesday Visit to the Moine Thrust at Knockan Crag, a world-famous spot where you can place your hands on either side of the Thrust. Then we'll head along Loch Assynt towards the coast, with several stops to explore the variety of rocks that make up this area.

Wednesday Explore the limestone valleys near Loch Assynt, which are unique in Scotland; they offer an interesting day's exploration of caves and disappearing rivers, including the Bone Caves. In these valleys we can appreciate the mountain-scale blocks that have been disturbed by movement along the Moine Thrust.

Thursday Various options, depending on the interests of the group and the weather. For example, we could walk (15km on rough paths) in to Eas a Chùal Aluinn, Britain's highest waterfall; or take the slightly easier option of a boat trip on Loch Glencoul.

Friday Head for home, with stops on the way to sample the wider area and appreciate the contrast between the rocks of the northwest and the schists to the east.

Details

Cost course fee £130 per person; this includes your guide (Angus Miller) and course organisation
YH accommodation, breakfasts & lunches £80 per person

Accommodation

We will be based at Ullapool Youth Hostel – the cost above covers four nights accommodation and self-service breakfasts and lunches. Alternatively if you'd prefer B&B or a hotel you are free to make your own arrangements, and there's plenty of choice in Ullapool – please ask for recommendations!

For evening meals there is a choice of eating out or self-catering if you are staying in the hostel. On previous trips most people have chosen to eat out at least some of the time, and Ullapool has a range of eating options.

Transport

This trip is organised on a self-drive basis. Car sharing is encouraged, to reduce the cost and our environmental impact, and to make the trip logistically easier.

Passengers are expected to contribute to costs. A rough guide for travel from Edinburgh, transport during the trip and return to Edinburgh would be £60 per person.

Level of fitness required

You will need to be reasonably fit and used to rough

walking, but the pace will be moderate with plenty of stops.

Booking Conditions

To book for the whole holiday, send a deposit of £50 (cheques payable to 'Geowalks'). There's a 5% discount on the course fee if you book and pay a deposit before 14 February. The final payment is due four weeks in advance. If you cancel your booking, refunds will be at my discretion and will usually only be made if I find someone to fill your place. Travel insurance is recommended.

In the unlikely event of the trip being cancelled, you will be informed immediately and receive a full refund.

Recommended Reading

A good general introduction to the area:
Northwest Highlands, Scottish Natural Heritage (Landscape fashioned by Geology Series), 2001. ISBN 1-85397-139-1.

Excellent sources for the wider picture:
Geology and Landscapes of Scotland, Con Gillen, 2003. Terra Publishing, ISBN 1-903544-09-2.

Land of Mountain and Flood, A McKirdy, J Gordon and R Crofts, 2007. Birlinn, ISBN 1-84158-357X.



Angus Miller, Geowalks

23 Summerfield Place, Edinburgh EH6 8AZ

0131 555 5488 / 0797 997 1310

angus@geowalks.demon.co.uk; www.geowalks.co.uk