

In brief

Category: moderate walk

Map Reference: OS Landranger 14
and Pathfinder 99 NB 10 / 20

Urgha to Reinigeadal Track

Walking Distance: 5.5km / 3.5 miles

Time: allow 3-4 hours

Parking is available in the village

Reinigeadal to Maraig Road

(to start of track from Maraig to Urgha)

Walking Distance: 6.5km / 4 miles

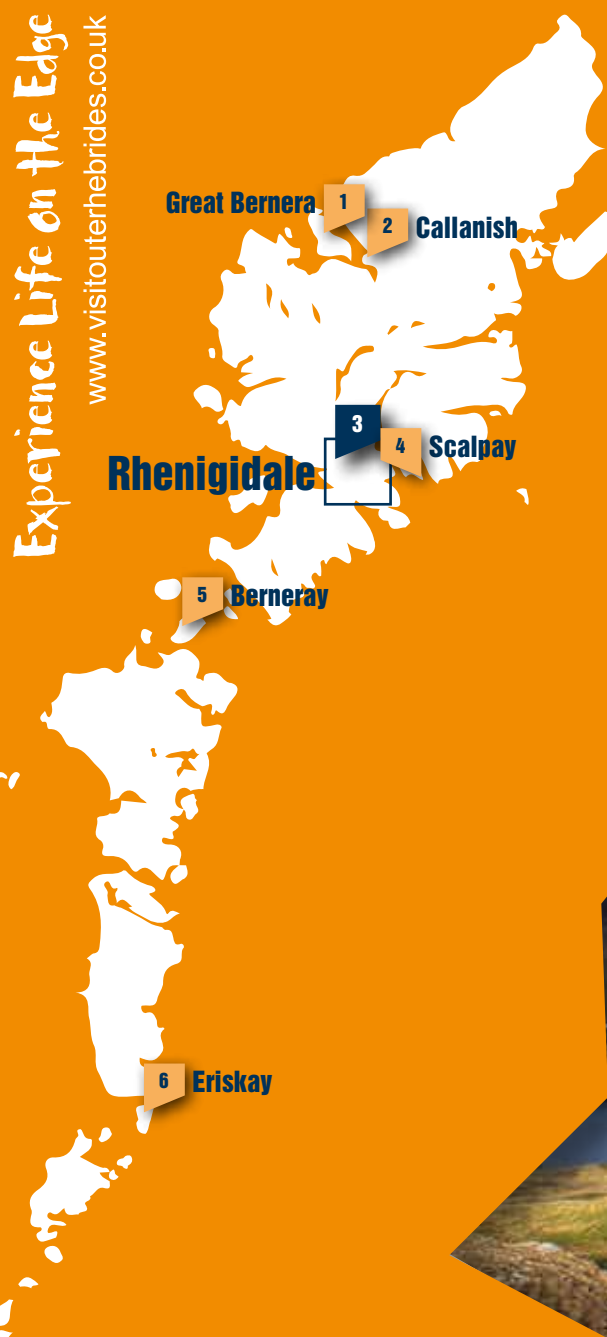
Time: allow 2-3 hours

Public telephone at bridge over Maraig River

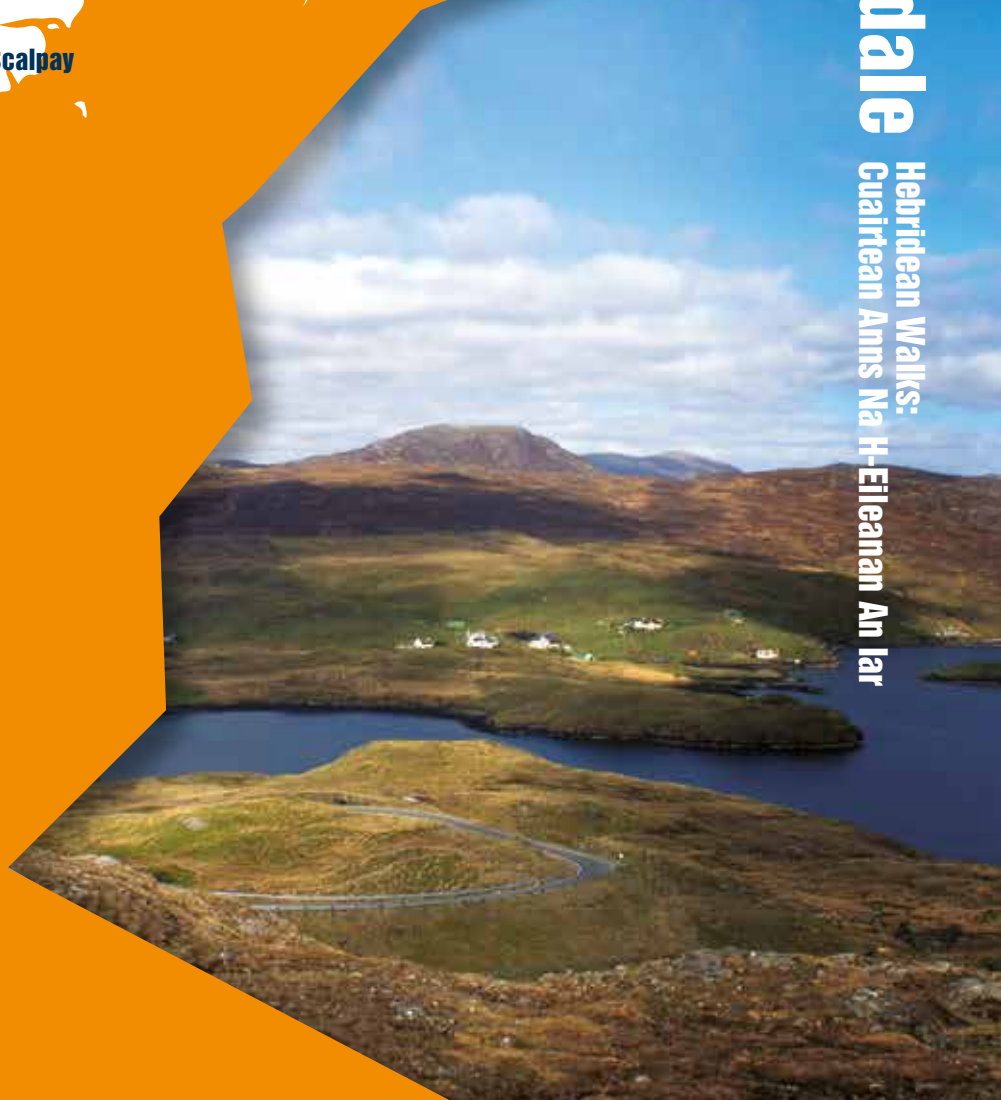
Maraig to Urgha Track

Walking Distance: 6km / 3.75km

Time: allow 2-3 hours



OUTER
HEBRIDES



Explore the rest of our Hebridean Walks!

How to get there?

From Stornoway travel south to Tarbert on the Isle of Harris. From Tarbert take the Kyles Scalpay road to Urgha where you will see a parking area signposted on your left. From here you have the option of walking the trail from Urgha to Rhenigidale or Urgha to Maraig. To walk the Urgha to Maraig trail once you have parked, you will have to walk back up the road about 0.25 of a mile where you will see the trail stretching along the shore of Loch Laxadale.



Follow the Crofting Code

- Please leave dogs behind, or ensure they are on a leash as they can be a danger to livestock.
- Park your car without blocking access for other vehicles.
- Please fasten gates.
- Leave no litter.
- Do not disturb breeding birds.
- Protect wildlife and plants.
- Avoid damaging archaeological sites.

For your safety

- Remember the weather here can be unpredictable!
- Wear sensible clothing and footwear.
- Take an OS map and a compass.
- Tell someone where you are going or leave a note visible on the dashboard of your car – stating your destination and estimated time of return.

Loch Seaforth



Explore...

The walk to Reinigeadal from Urgha, near Tairbeart, is one of the most spectacular walks in Harris, but it is also challenging, requiring stout footwear and a head for heights. In return it offers some of the best panoramic views in the island, and a sense of being alone with nature, which is hard to find in the modern day world.

The walk can be completed in two hours, but who would want to hurry it? Four hours is a reasonable time to allow yourself, with plenty of pauses to survey the view. On the way, there are several short-cuts which the Reinigeadal people used to take when this track was their only land-link with the outside world, but these are no longer maintained, and should not be attempted.

Beinn a' Chaolais

The track to Reinigeadal starts at the car park on the east side of the bridge across the Lacasdal Lochs, on the road from Tairbeart to Caolas Scalpaigh. The track climbs steeply up the side of Beinn a' Chaolais, crossing and re-crossing Abhainn an t-Stratha on its way to the bealach (or

pass) between the tops of Trollamul (330m) and Beinn Tarsuinn (323m).

From the track there are excellent views back across East Loch Tairbeart and across to the rocky lands of the Bays, and behind them the hill of Beinn Losgaintir. The highest point of the path is around 280m.

From here it descends gently through deep peat, with its own plant life of mosses and lichens among the heather. Just beyond the summit, a path cuts off to the right, leading to the now deserted village of Molinginis.

The walk to Molinginis is less strenuous than that to Reinigeadal, and leads to the ruins of the little village amid elder trees above the stony beach which gives the village its name. At one time there was a path linking Molinginis with Reinigeadal along the shore, but this is no longer passable.



Wildlife

Although in winter birdlife is sparse on this peaty hillside, in summer the moor is full of Meadow Pipits, Wheatears and Stonechats, and Wrens and Wagtails can be found along the bed of the stream, while on the higher moorlands can be heard the melancholy whistle of the Feadag (Golden Plover). Golden Eagles and Buzzards soar overhead, and Ravens and Hooded Crows are common.

Red Deer that wander the hill tops during the summer, drop down into the glens during the winter and the elusive Mountain Hare can occasionally be seen in their white winter coats.



The Sgriob

Going back to the main path, we start to drop steeply, and a magnificent view opens out, over the headland of Reinigeadal itself and across Loch Siophort to the empty hills and valleys of the Pairc area of Lewis.

Well out to sea are the Shiant Isles, once occupied by resident shepherds, but now only visited occasionally by crofters tending to their sheep. The Shiants are best known now for the seabird cliffs and for their black rats! Beyond the Shiants you can see the mountains of mainland Scotland.

The path now starts on the zigzags of the Sgriob, down a rocky cliff face to the head of Loch Trollamaraig. The descent is steep, and calls for caution especially when the grass of the path is wet and slippery. Below lies Loch Trollamaraig, a grand place to watch seabirds; gulls, terns, shag and the occasional heron stalking in the shadows. In the deeper water can be seen porpoise, dolphin and gannets, with seals and otters to be found in the shallower water. Sea trout can also be found in the loch and stream.

The lower slopes of the hill beside the path carry surprisingly lush vegetation, after the barren slopes of the higher hill, and among the ferns

can be glimpsed primroses in season and violets, looking much too fragile for their surroundings. Wrens and song thrushes sing, their voices echoing off the steep rock faces, while the sounds of waterfalls are all around.

The path reaches the shore near the bridge across Abhainn Cheann a' Locha, which comes rushing down the steep Glen Trollamaraig, thundering over a spectacular waterfall at the head of the valley itself. The valley has a different plant life from the rest of the area, with little shrubs of willow, aspen and honeysuckle and patches of foxglove and woodrush. The insect life is different also, with many beetles and the occasional dragonfly – but not enough unfortunately, to keep down the numbers of midges!



Ceann a' Loch

After a rest at the head of Loch Trollamaraig, we can head off again along the path and over the bridge across the stream of Abhainn Kerram. Here, there used to be a short cut along the cliff-face, but it has not been maintained for several years, and should not be attempted.

The main track climbs steeply inland, and cross the headland of the Srom Mor. A large boulder with intricate folding marks a tremendous view back to the cliff path we descended on the Sgriob.

The path then drops sharply once more to the sea, and crosses the stream of Allt Dubh, coming from the hill slopes of

Toddun, (528m) high above us. The little pool in the stream above the road is one of those little places that never fail to charm, and the water in the pool is extremely cold! Next we come to the bridge across the stream at Gil mhic Ailean, with its rowan and holly trees growing on the cliff face – and do remember to shut the gate firmly behind you, as this is the boundary of the Reinigeadal township.

On the left hand side of the track there is a single willow tree, and just above this there are interesting markings in the rock, reminiscent of the old tramway sets of the mainland cities!

Gearraidh Aleteger

We are coming now to Gearraidh Aleteger, the most westerly houses of the township. The earliest of these houses will date from the early 1800; the houses have been empty now for many years, but their ruins present a very picturesque scene on the sides of Abhainn a' Ghearraidh.

They represent a lifestyle long past, where every scrap of the land had to be utilised, and together with the sea, presented a way of life which was Spartan, but rich in many other ways.

Around the houses there are Iris beds and again the rushing of the water in the stream blends with the songs of the birds that shelter in its banks.

From Gearraidh Aleteger we climb again, high above the ruins of the houses. A surprising number of trees manage to find a grasp on the rocks above the loch-shore, while on either side of the path are little feannagan – lazy beds, where the crofters built up what little soil there was available into little beds for the cultivation of potatoes and of fodder for their cattle.



Reinigeadal

The track passes through another gate, and joins the new road, into the village of Reinigeadal itself. The village was settled in the 1820s by people evicted from the North Harris deer forest. Prior to that there were boundary shepherds, keeping the march between the farms of Scalpaigh and Maraig. Until 1989 the only access to Reinigeadal was by boat or across the Sgriob or through the moors between the village and Maraig.

Now a road has come to the village bringing a new way of life. If the village has lost some of its charm to visitors, the inhabitants will soon tell you what a difference it has made for them to be within easy reach of the shops and of a doctor!

There is a Gatliff Trust Hostel in the village, which provides basic accommodation. If you wish to return to Tairbeart, you can retrace your steps to Urgha, or perhaps you may have arranged transport to meet you in the village.

Maraig to Urgha

For the strong walker there is a further route which can be taken, along the new road to Maraig, with its spectacular views over Loch Siophort.

At the bridge over the river at the head of Loch Maraig, turn off the road through a gate on to a track, this will lead you to the old pack road from Tairbeart to Steornabagh, back to the car park at Urgha from which we left for Reinigeadal.

This track follows the Maraig River for a time, then turns sharply south where it meets the old track from the Steornabagh road. From here it rises steadily along Braigh an Ruisg, then drops to the head of Loch Lacasdal.

On both sides of the loch can be seen the green patches of airidhean, summer shielings to which the crofters used to bring their cattle, thus keeping them away from the crops on the crofts. The path follows the west shore, under the cliff faces of the hill Torsacleit. Here can be seen ravens and eagles, while the loch itself has a range of waterfowl.

The lochs attract an increasing run of salmon and sea-trout with fishing available from mid-May to mid-October. Phone Sammy Macleod on 01859 502009.

We can continue along the track until we meet the main road from Tairbeart to Caolas Scalpaigh. There we turn east, along the road, past the salmon hatchery, across the bridge spanning the outflow from Loch Lacasdal, and back to the car park from which we set off to Reinigeadal.

