

- Ullapool (supermarkets, specialty outdoor shops)
- Kinlochbervie (small supermarket)

WATER

Water is freely available almost everywhere. It's generally safe to drink from streams in the Scottish Highlands, but consider filtering or treating water if cattle or sheep are nearby. In normal conditions, you'll rarely need to carry more than 1 L of water at a time.

BONUS TRACKS

There are two common CWT variants which, if taken, make the trail easier.

THE GREAT GLEN VARIANT

This route avoids Knoydart by heading directly north from Fort William. It follows the Great Glen Way for about 40km (25 mi) to Invergarry before heading west through Kintail and joining the main CWT at Shiel Bridge.

THE COULIN PASS VARIANT

After Maol Bhuidhe, instead of heading west to Strathcarron and through Torrison, head north over Bealach Bhearnais to Achnashellach and then over the Coulin Pass to Kinlochewe, bypassing the difficult Torrison stage.

BACKGROUND

TRAIL ORIGINS

The Cape Wrath Trail as we know it today began in 1996 with David Paterson's book *The Cape Wrath Trail: A 200-Mile Walk through the North-West Scottish Highlands*. The excellent Knoydart variant, now accepted as one of the finest stages, was first proposed by Denis Brook and Phil Hinchcliffe in their 1999 book *North to the Cape: A Trek from Fort William to Cape Wrath*, and the whole route was further refined by Cameron McNeish, former editor of *The Great Outdoors* magazine. For the last few years, it's become an increasingly popular objective amongst hikers from the United States who are looking to build

up their experience in remote country prior to taking on the Pacific Crest Trail or the Continental Divide Trail.



FLORA & FAUNA

RED DEER

One animal you're certain to see along the CWT is the red deer. The U.K.'s largest native land mammal is a magnificent beast; stags sport impressive pairs of antlers, and in autumn they can be heard bellowing as they clash in fierce contests for breeding privileges. There are over half a million red deer in Scotland. Most belong to vast estates where customers pay to stalk and shoot the animals. This form of land use, which came to prominence in the nineteenth century, is largely responsible for the treeless, nature-depleted landscape covering most of the Highlands, because overgrazing by artificially high numbers of deer prevents trees from growing. In some areas, deer numbers are now being suppressed with extremely positive results, such as near Beinn Eighe.

AUTHOR'S ANECDOTES

NAEBOOTS ON THE CAPE WRATH TRAIL

On my first Cape Wrath Trail in 2015, Kinlochewe to Shenavall bothy, taking me over the halfway point, was a long, tough

stage. The weather had turned once again. I found myself slogging through bog and mist, kilometers from anywhere, and wondering why I was putting myself through this. My feet had been wet for a week. What on earth was I doing?

By the time I reached Shenavall, I was just about ready to give up. Thanks to the rain and low cloud, I'd seen nothing of the mountain landscape I'd been so looking forward to walking through. When the weather's foul, it's all you can do just to keep putting one foot in front of the other and sticking to your compass bearing. But I had reached Shenavall, a very special bothy hidden beneath An Teallach's mountain fortress, and the unique culture of the British hills lifted my spirits immediately: fire, hot food, whisky, and stories, all shared equally with everyone staying that night. After days of solitude, I felt part of a trail community again.

The next morning, I met an American named Jamie who gave me my trail name: Naeboots. Trail names are commonly used in the U.S. but are unusual this side of the Atlantic. We were talking to a Scottish hiker, who mentioned that I'd walked over 100km (62 mi) "wi' nae boots, just flimsy trainers" and Jamie suggested that I adopt this moniker. From that moment on, I signed my name in every bothy logbook as Alex "Naeboots" Roddie.

A NIGHT AT CAPE WRATH

On my second CWT (February 2019), I hiked most of the trail in solitude, and the only person I saw more than once was a 16-year-old guy called Skye. Both of us wondered who would be first to complete the trail. We kept leapfrogging each other, but he suffered from foot problems and doubted he'd finish at all.

On March 1, I set out over the windswept, pathless landscape of Cape Wrath, drawing into the end of the trail. I saw no one, and after reaching the end spent a night in Kearvaig bothy on the edge of the Atlantic in perfect solitude. Only days later, after returning to civilization, did I hear from Skye; he'd completed it after all, several days after I did.

