

A Brief Guide To The Hill Loch Fishing Of Gairloch and District

A local guide by D.W. Roxborough.

This guide was reproduced from the originals supplied by Derek Roxborough by Wild Fishing Scotland <http://www.wild-fishing-scotland.co.uk> a website dedicated to Scotland's wonderful wild trout fishing.

As an introduction to game fishing in the Gairloch area it will be best to itemise the legal aspect :

While wild brown trout fishing in Scotland is generally supposed to be free, this is not necessarily so, as there is a problem of access. The access to any brown trout fishing is the property of the land owner or his / her lessees. The land owner is within his right to remove people from his land if they are there without prior permission. There is a law of trespass in Scotland but this is a civil matter and involves a lengthy process of law, persistent trespass can become a different matter. Enough of the law, it would pay the prospective fisherman to be sure he has the appropriate permission to fish the various waters in the area.

Proprietors of fishing in the Gairloch area are as follows :

Gairloch Angling Club with much brown trout fishing on many hill lochs in the area plus salmon and sea trout fishing on the River Kerry. Tickets are available from shops in the area and the Creag Mhor Hotel.

Shieldaig Lodge Hotel with salmon and sea trout fishing on Loch Badachro, the River Badachro and brown trout fishing on the famous Fairy Lochs, Loch Gobhain and other lochs in the area.. Hotel guests have first priority.

Inveran Estates have the River Ewe and the lower end of Loch Maree, fishing when available is from the keeper at Poolewe.

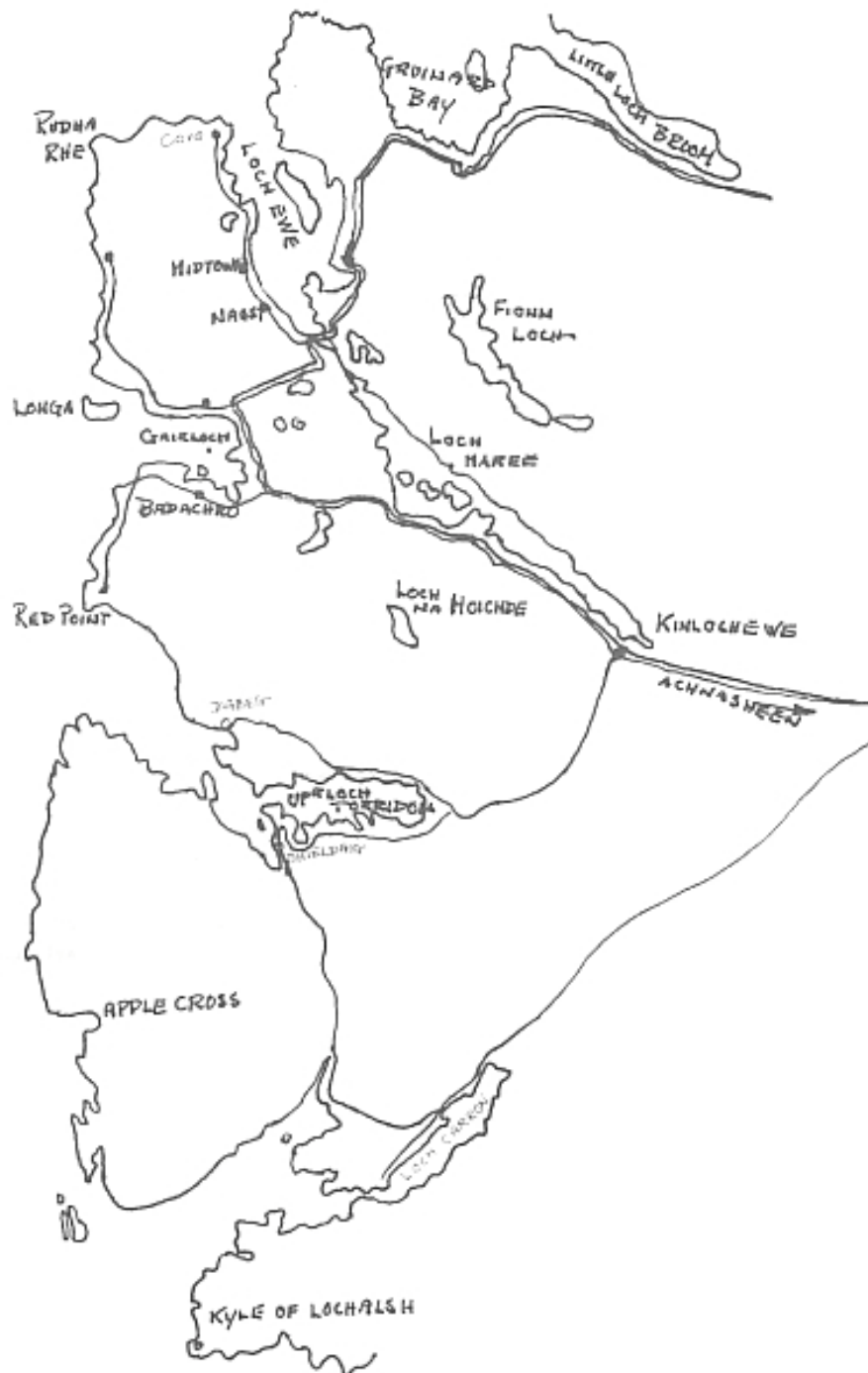
The National for Scotland (Inverewe) has fishing on lochs, including Kernsary and Loch na Ba Coul. Tickets from Inverewe Gardens.

Kinlochewe Angling Club has hill loch fishing on various lochs throughout the area.

Laide Post Office sells tickets to the lochs on the Slaggan Peninsula.

Loch Maree Hotel Loch Maree.

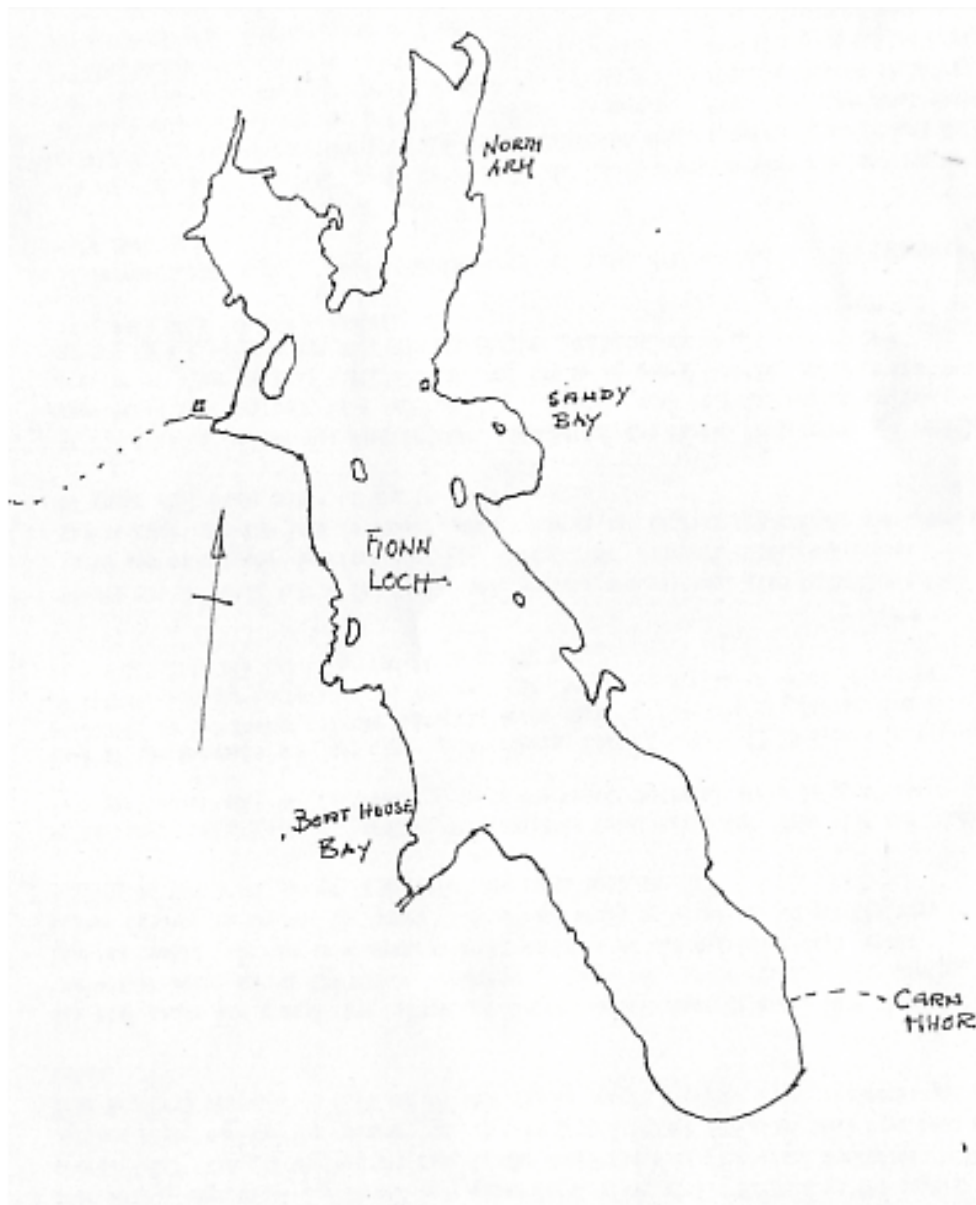
Many lochs have no apparent owners but it is best to make enquires to make sure, even local knowledge may be out of date and with the increase in popularity of game fishing, things are changing all the time.



Fionn Loch Gairloch AC has a boat on the **Fionn Loch** but it is for the use of locals & only by arrangement with Letterewe estate. You must have a local address to get on the loch. This loch has many fishing spots, each of them with their own peculiarities. **Boat House Bay** is one such place. **Sandy Bay** produces good fish and round the islands. The islands are designated S.S.S.I's . and landing is restricted. The north arm fishes well and there are various marks in the bay towards the outlet river, all producing good fish..

Flies for the **Fionn loch** are all the traditional patterns in large sizes. Dapping works well here as it does on many other lochs. Salmon and sea trout can be encountered here, it is courtesy to return them. The angling cub lease is for brown trout. The stalker at Kernsary will want your returns on the way back. Plan to be back before 8.00PM.

A word of caution, this loch is full of sunken rocks and it is irresponsible to go scudding around at full throttle. The other thing is the weather. It can change from a ripple to a full gale in minutes, the length of the loch is such that the fetch of the waves can reach sea proportions and be very dangerous indeed for the unwary. Enjoy your fishing but take care.



The Lochs and Lochans under the lease of Gairloch Angling Club are **Loch Garbhaig** above the forest at Slattadale. Access to this is via the forestry track, right up to the small hydro dam. A largish loch containing trout to 1 lb, a dour loch at times, the far end and the incoming burn fish best. Normal wet flies will do the job.

Loch an Garbh Doire, follow the hill round to the left from the top of the Mihol road, past a weedy loch on your left hand side and follow the burn up to the biggish loch, 4 or 5 to the pound will be the average size of the trout here with the odd one to ½ lb. On the right day plenty of trout will be caught. It needs a good ripple.

Loch Coire na Airighe bear right at the top of the Mihol road past the sheep fank a short track leads to this loch. Another weedy loch but easier to fish than its neighbour (the **Feir Loch**) has no trout of any

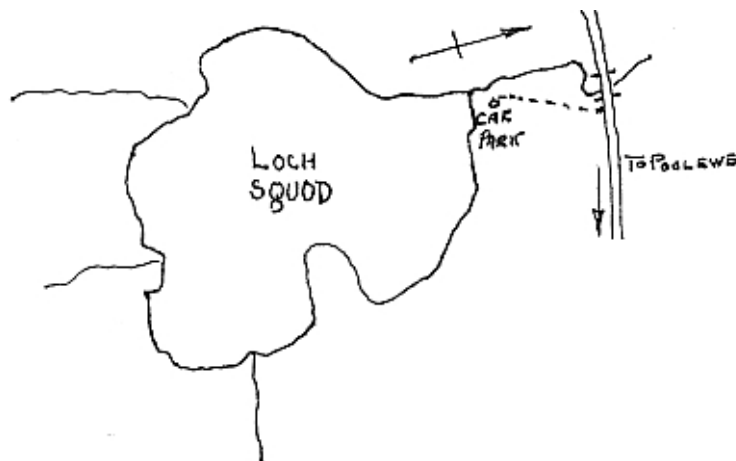
size but always seems as though it should. A short walk east of the loch brings you out to the **Feir Loch**, well named, feir being the Gaelic for grass. Not much to say about this loch, the fish being very small, but local children seem to get pleasure out of it. The Poolewe road can be seen from here and the road back to Gairloch.

List Of Popular Gairloch Angling Club Lochs and their grid references.

Tollaidh (or Tolly)	NG 840 765
Bad na Scalaig	NG 850 710
Fionn	NG 950 785
Buineachain	NG 855 735
na breac	NG 815 783
Doire Airighe	NG 875 740
Feithe Mugaidh	NG 860 745
Dhu na Beiste	NG 865 733
Airighe a phuill	NG 840 755
Loch Claire	NG 820 765
Airighe na Criadh	NG 830 765
Coire an Airighe	NG 805 785
an Drum nan Uaig	NG 824 769
Grass Loch	NG 810 782
Am Feur Loch	NG 859 710
Loch Squod	NG 810 875

Various unnamed lochs, always worth a cast, some of the smaller lochs can hold surprises.

The flies used in the area are, in the main, all the well known and traditionally used patterns, together with the “bumbles”, fiery and golden. Dark flies seem to do well on the bob together with the Orange Worm fly. Some lochs have a hatch of up-wing flies in late spring and early summer and an Iron Blue dry fly will work in a ripple. One pattern with a grey squirrel hackle, heron herl body with fine gold wire rib and two heron whisks fishes well whenever there is a hatch of up-wings (pond olives). The Zulus do well and a variant Purple Zulu instead of the blue can sometimes make the day. Size 12 is considered small enough with 8’s in a good ripple. A lightly dressed size 12, even on a clam day, can produce some surprising results.

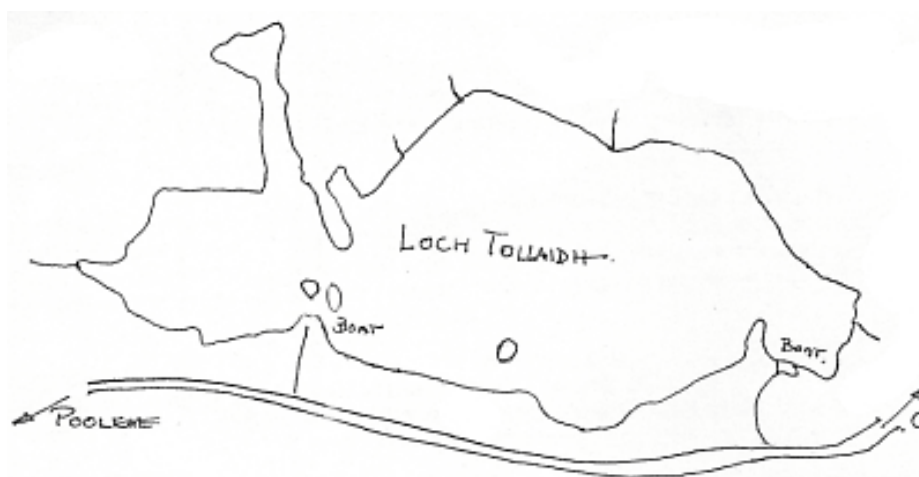


Loch Squod leased by Gairloch angling club, is a mid to late summer and autumn loch, enjoying a run of sea trout from the end of July onwards, although early anglers may get a surprise. The loch is set in the peat bogs to the south of Firemore Sands. A broad loch, it fishes well from most places on the bank. When wading, care must be taken as the bottom abounds with boulders in places and a trip or a slip could have serious consequences. The south end of the loch is generally the best bet around the reed beds, but anywhere, where there are rocks and prominences fish well.

When using the boat on **Loch Squod** care must be taken with hidden rocks. Drifts down the west side and among the reed beds are best. Dapping is successful, flies do well. The fishery is fly only and

anyone not doing this will be asked to leave. The boat must be taken up and locked to the pole to avoid damage. Tickets are available from Poolewe craft shop.

Generally the club has a policy of not allowing advanced booking of more than 3 or 4 days ahead. Club members can use the boats in the evening free of charge, after making sure they are available. If the boats are not in use then visitors may book them at the going rate.



Loch Tollaidh by the Poolewe road is a fine loch from boat or shore. There are two boats and the loch produces fish almost anywhere. The boat house end seems to be the most dour and the Poolewe end produces a lot of the smaller fish. The larger fish seem to hug the shallows, especially where there are boulders on the bottom. The long arm to the south east is another hot spot.

Above the loch, up the feeder burn, is **Loch Larigh** a small scenic loch, it has fish up to ½ lb. but can be difficult to fish on account of sunken reefs. A loch to the left of this has a reputation of being the loch where all the arms were dumped at the time of proscription after Culloden.

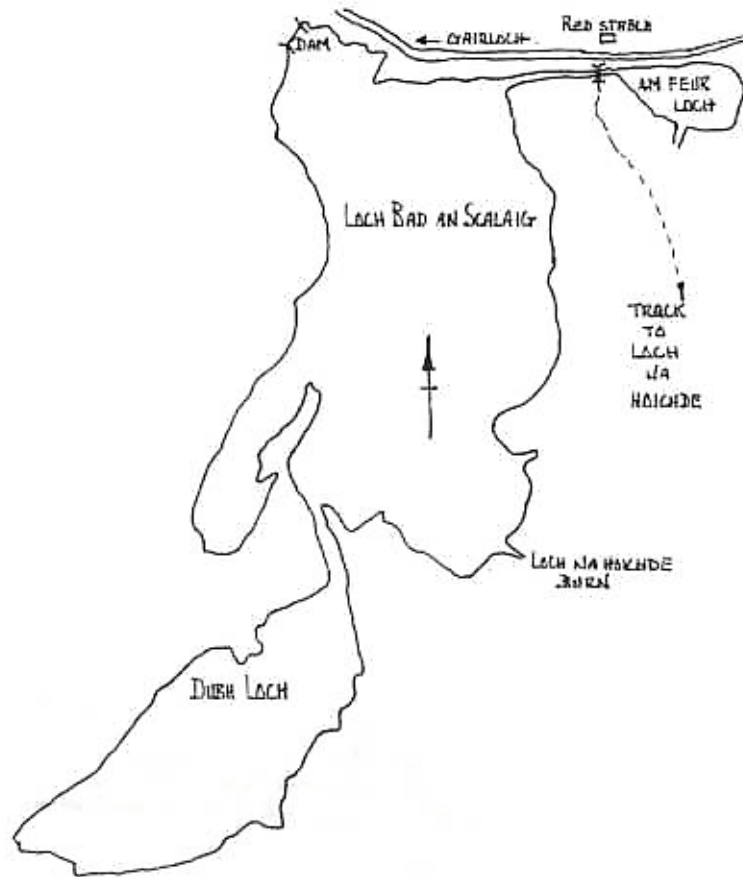
The bigger lochs, **Tollaidh** and **Bad an Scalaig**, have good fish. **Tollaidh** has produced fish to 4 ½ lb and **Bad an Scalaig** can produce fish of 1 lb plus up to 3 lb. The Invicta is a favourite fly of mine on this loch. There are also pike in this loch and they are sometimes caught on fly.

Heading towards Poolewe from Gairloch on the north west side of the road, two lochs can be seen, the first is the **Feir Loch** (grass loch) and the next is **Lochan nam Breac** (breac meaning speckled). Both these lochs contain numerous small trout, although **Lochan nam Breac** is stocked. The path to **Loch bad a' Chramh** goes past this loch.

Further up the road, past the quarry, a burn runs down the hill on the south side of the road., past the rubbish dump. The burn is called **Alt Eas Bhan** (burn of the white waterfall), following this burn up leads to **Loch Airighe Mhic Craigh**, another rambling loch, full of small, 4 – 5 to the pound fish, around this are various small lochs, one of which has been known to hold the odd 1 lb plus fish.

South west of this loch, through a pass in the hill, leads past a small lochan, this is worth a cast or two. The outfall burn of this loch runs into the **Mill Loch**, above Flowerdale. This loch is usually avoided when guests of Flowerdale House are fishing it.

North west across the peat hags are two rambling weedy lochs, **Loch Sheana Bhaile** first, has the occasional ½ lb trout, but lots of smaller fish. **Loch Claire** is somewhat similar in style and content, although all lochans can hold surprises. Follow the outlet burn down to the fence and the fence to the road.



Another good loch under the lease of the angling club is **Loch Bad an Scalaig**. It is a large loch created by a hydro dam.

Two boats are available,. The loch can produce fish almost anywhere, although away from the dam is best. The bay by the waterfall and arm all hold fish. A dour loch by reputation, the trout from here are worth the effort. Fish of 2 to 3 lb are regularly caught and of 1lb average. The water levels vary a lot here. Occasional passage through to the **Dubh Loch**, with care, can be had, and good fish can be had though smaller on average.

Am Feur Loch joins Bad an Scalaig via a short burn. It is a dour loch but trout of 3lb have been caught on the fly. The size is kept up by the pike in it. Following the **Loch na h-oidhche** track for 20 minutes and looking south east you can see **Lochan a' Chleirich** the outlet burn from this runs into **Am Feur Loch**. It has lots of small trout, 4 or 5 to the pound, but plump hard fighting little trout. An ideal place to reach youngsters to fish.

Across the road behind the Red Stable follow the burn up the wee glen until you come to a loch shaped roughly like a boomerang., this is **Loch nam Buainichean**. It has trout up to ½ lb and the potential for bigger. It is quite a deep loch with part of it unfishable Southwest is a long thin loch, like part of a river, no big trout, about 3 to the pound would be good. A good climb above this to the northeast, lies **Loch Doire na h-Airighe**, a spectacle type loch with small fish but some of ½ pound plus. North of this, in the hummocks are various small lochs, breeding ground of smooth newt and red throated diver and the occasional large trout to 1 ¾ lb

West north west of **Loch Doire na h-Airighe**, is **Loch na Feithe Mugaig** a rambling loch with lots of bays and inlets, ½ lb fish have been caught but expect lots smaller. A path from the end of this loch leads to Kerrysdale or back down to **Loch nam Buainichean**, via another loch with numerous small trout, then down to the Red Stable.



Loch Airighe a' Phuill at the head of Flowerdale with the Flowerdale river running from it. Small fish are the order of the day, but around the side of the hill to the south (an Groban) is a small loch which has fish of a respectable size.

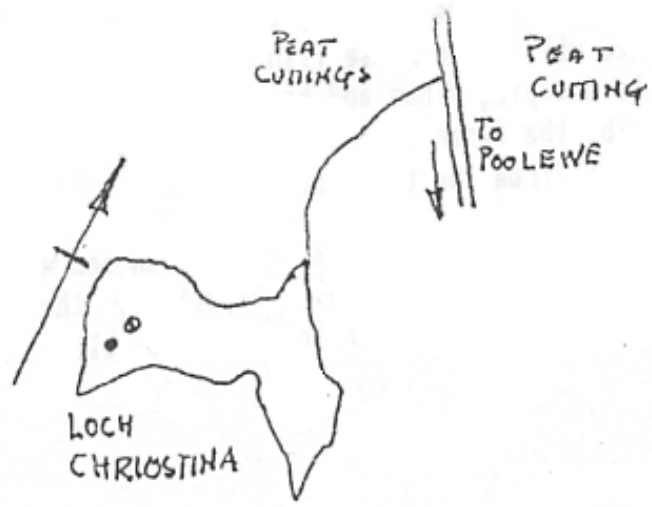
It must be stated that an Ordnance Survey map or the Land Ranger series of the area is a must, also a compass (and the ability to use it) would not go amiss. While the information here is up to date at the time of writing, times change, estates change hands all too rapidly these days. So no responsibility can be taken for any mistakes or information that may now be out of date. There are other lochs in the area from Poolewe to cove, these are out with the lease of Gairloch Angling Club, except for **Loch Squod**.

The other lochs all hold brown trout and permission to fish these lochs should be sought from the keeper at Poolewe. The furthest away lochs are **Loch an Draing** and **Loch nan Eun**, both hold decent fish and **Loch an Draing** has arctic charr in it. The Cove Lochs are dour but have the reputation of the odd good fish

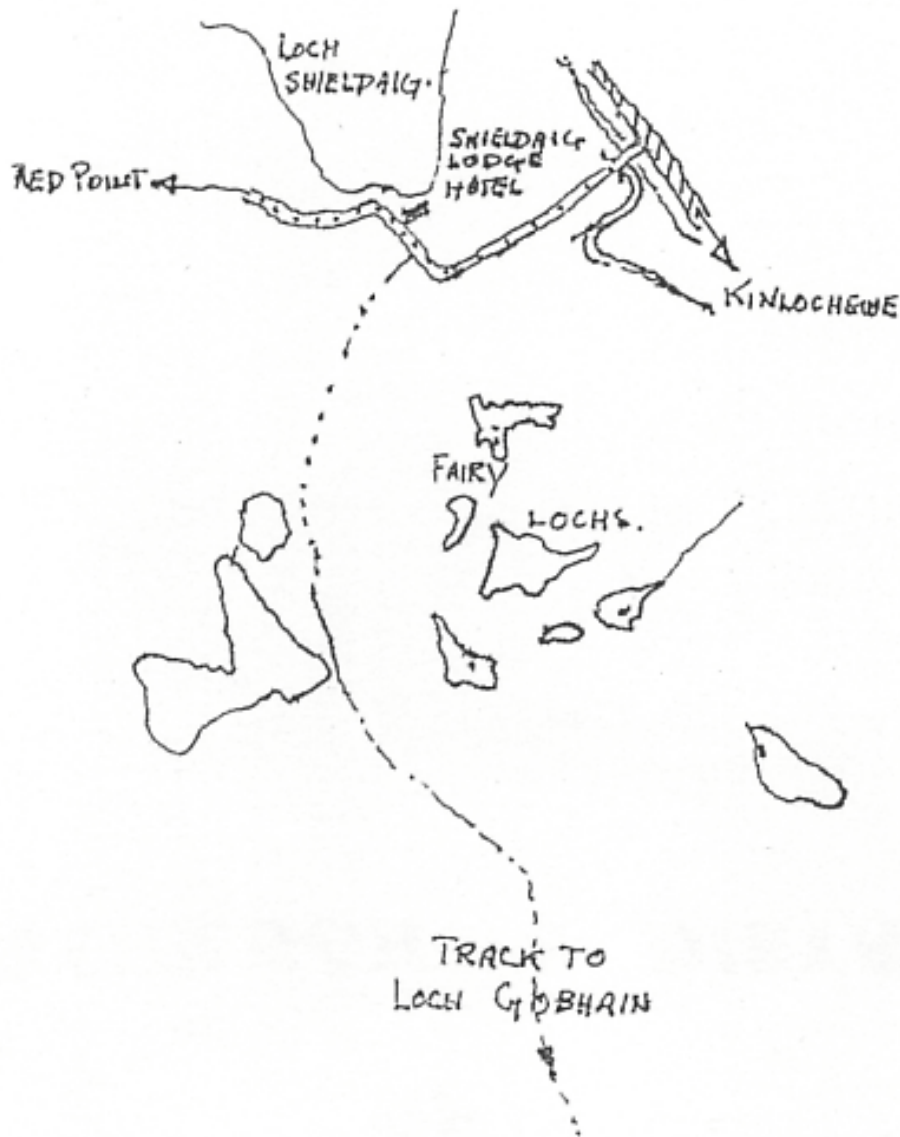
The lochs from Stirrhill over to the Fedan Mhor, **Loch Alt Eoin Thomais**, **Loch Airighe an Eilein** and **Loch na Feithe Dirich** all hold fish. **Loch Alt Eoin Thomais** has yielded fish up to 3 lb.

Back to Naast, a steep walk above Naast, to the SW you will come to the Naast lochs, both full of small fish but very plentiful. Good sport can be had.

A shortish walk to the south east is a roundish loch low in the peat. **Lochan Sgeirreach**, the rocky loch. There are some decent fish to be had here, fish to 11lb and good hard fighting fish. From the northeast side of the loch, head towards some rocky hillocks overlooking Loch Ewe, doing this should bring you to a weedy loch. This is one of the few lochs I don't really recommend other than to say you fished it. Its got a huge head of tiny fish and that's about all that can be said.



Now head towards the hillocks, roughly N.N.E. In among the rocky hills is a gem of a lochan, complete with islet **Loch Christina**. It's a dour loch but any fish from this loch are worth having and well earned.. The islet has some of the best blueberries I have ever had.



The next group of lochs belong to the Shildaig Lodge Hotel.

Permission must be sought as the guests have priority. A track from Shildaig leads to a group of lochs starting with **Lochan Fuar** which has small fish, followed by **Loch a' Braigh Horrisdale**, again small fish. So on to **Loch Gaineamhach** (sandy loch), very shallow around the edges but good fish found here, the evening rise can produce fish of $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 lb. Moving on up the wide glen the ruin of a burnt out bothy is the next landmark, the track narrows and bears SE to **Loch a' Gobhainn**. Masses of 6 to 8 oz fish can be caught here from bank or boat. The next loch from here is **Loch a' Bhealaich**, a long wide loch. The author has not fished this loch so can only refer the reader to 'The Trout Lochs Of Scotland' by Bruce Sandison.

Back down the track again and up in the group of hills above Shildaig farm is a group of lochs known as the **Fairy Lochs**. Including the **Aeroplane Loch** where the remains of a liberator that crashed in 1946 lies, a memorial plaque commemorates the disaster. The large **Fairy Loch** has some excellent fishing, in and among the bays and islands, fish of 3 lb have been caught. The rest of the lochs among the hills contain fish to 1 lb. The fishing here is ever a surprise, you never know whether you will see an otter or an eagle. Whatever you do, you will have a memorable time.

Further hill lochs under the control of the Shildaig hotel are, **Loch Bad na Achlaise**, **Loch Clair**, **Lochan nam Breac Odhar** and also **Loch Airighe Uilleim**. Each of these lochs has its own peculiarities, **Loch Bad na Achlaise** contains trout and charr, it is also connected to the sea via a burn, it is rumoured to get the odd sea trout. **Loch Clair** has its own reputation of hard fighting trout in the $\frac{3}{4}$ lb region.

Lochan nam Breac Odhar and **Loch Airighe Uilleim** have the reputation of being dour but any fish caught are worth catching.

Flies for these and other lochs are always a matter of personal choice. The traditional patterns always work well. My particular favourite is the Invicta. A typical cast would be : the Invicta on the point, Fiery Brown or Fiery Bumble in the middle and Kate McLaren or Zulu on the bob. An Invicta will often rise fish when no other fly will. Another good fly is the Shredge, with its drooping wings and brownish body. No fly in the Highlands should be without its wire rib, the finer wire on the representative patterns, this gives the fly a longer life protecting it from the teeth of the trout.

Local shops sell the traditional patterns. The Irish and Welsh patterns fish well on these lochs. Generally the dark flies do well, especially the fully dressed bushy flies in the larger sizes, 12 and up. On the larger lochs on a blowy day, even a size 6 can be small enough.

The lochs at the head of Strath Lungard. Permission here is sketchy. I understand the lochs are on the estate of Gurdie but some of it may be Nature Conservancy. Make enquires at Kinlochewe.

If you decide to go, it may be best to camp. You can walk up from Grudie or the Corrie Dudh in Torridon. From the Grudie, follow a good stalkers path as far as it goes, it ends up at the burn. From there follow the burn up the strath. The burn eventually falls out of Corrie Mhic Fearchair, you bear north west to a prominent crag, Carn na Feola, you will come across a number of lochs but **Loch an Carn na Feola** is the biggest with fish of $\frac{1}{2}$ lb plus. Some lochs have the usual run of the mill 4 or 5 to the pound trout, but **Loch a' Chaorain** has fish to $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. Herds of red deer often gather here.

You can make your way out the way you came in or you can make your way through the drumlin hillocks, cross the stony ridge to the north and come out at the **Gorm Lochs** and the Pocadh Buidhe, the track to the Red Stable and there on back to Gairloch.

Sand River and **Loch Seana Bhaile**. Permission to fish the loch and the river from Mr Cameron, sands Holiday Centre. The river is a spate river and has a run of sea trout and grilse during the middle and late summer. Pools higher up the river hold sea trout after a spate.

Loch Seana Bhaile is the water supply for North Erradale and Big Sand. the valve house can be seen from the road, a short climb brings you up to the loch. The loch holds brown trout and occasional silvery trout that are supposed to be descendants of sea trout parr taken up there from the Sand river, fish up to $\frac{3}{4}$ lb can be taken.

The hill-walking angler by nature is an optimist, even on a blank day there will be something to take home even if it is only a memory.

Some of the hill lochs contain large numbers of small trout. Baskets of 50 to 80 are not uncommon. It would be a difficult decision to make, but some of these fish would be better fed to the cat.

Loch na h-Oidhche and the **Gorm Lochs** Permission from Les. Lamb, Anchorage, Pier Road, Gairloch. A walk of 2 to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours from the Red Stable brings you to the boat house at the north end of **Loch na h-Oidhche**. At the other end of the loch is the stalkers bothy, The Poca Buidhe. This is usually let with the fishing of the lochs. So accommodation is provided together with a boat and outboard. The boat is transport to the bothy. **Loch na h-Oidhche** is about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles long and fishes best at either end in the evening. Fish of 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ are taken but the average would be $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ lb, but bags of over 100 have been recorded in the past.

The real gems of the place are the **Gorm Lochs**, a group of lochs visible from the bothy in among the moraine boulders. Fish of all classes and sizes up to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb have been taken from these lochs. A hatch

of pond olives happens here, but the midges are lethal. Luckily it is easy to beat a hasty retreat to the bothy. But the quality of fishing makes it worthwhile.

Permission for the following lochs (**Sgeireach, na Curra etc**) from : Les. Lamb, Anchorage, Pier Road, Gairloch. Walking up from the Poolewe road brings you to **Lochan nam Breac** (815 783). Follow up the small glen until you come to a reedy loch, by this time the track should be obvious and moving on, you should see signs of water main markers. Follow these signs for a while until the ground rises, follow the rise and the track until you come to **Loch Sgeireach** this loch has a large island and lots of rocks. It also has a good head of trout over the ½ lb mark. North of here on the same track you shortly come to **Loch Bad a' Chreamh** This is a large loch with two islands and numerous rocks. There is a boat and apart from the very centre of the loch, north of the islands, just about anywhere will produce very good quality fish. Fish over 2 lb have been taken but ½ lb to ¾ lb can be taken in plenty.

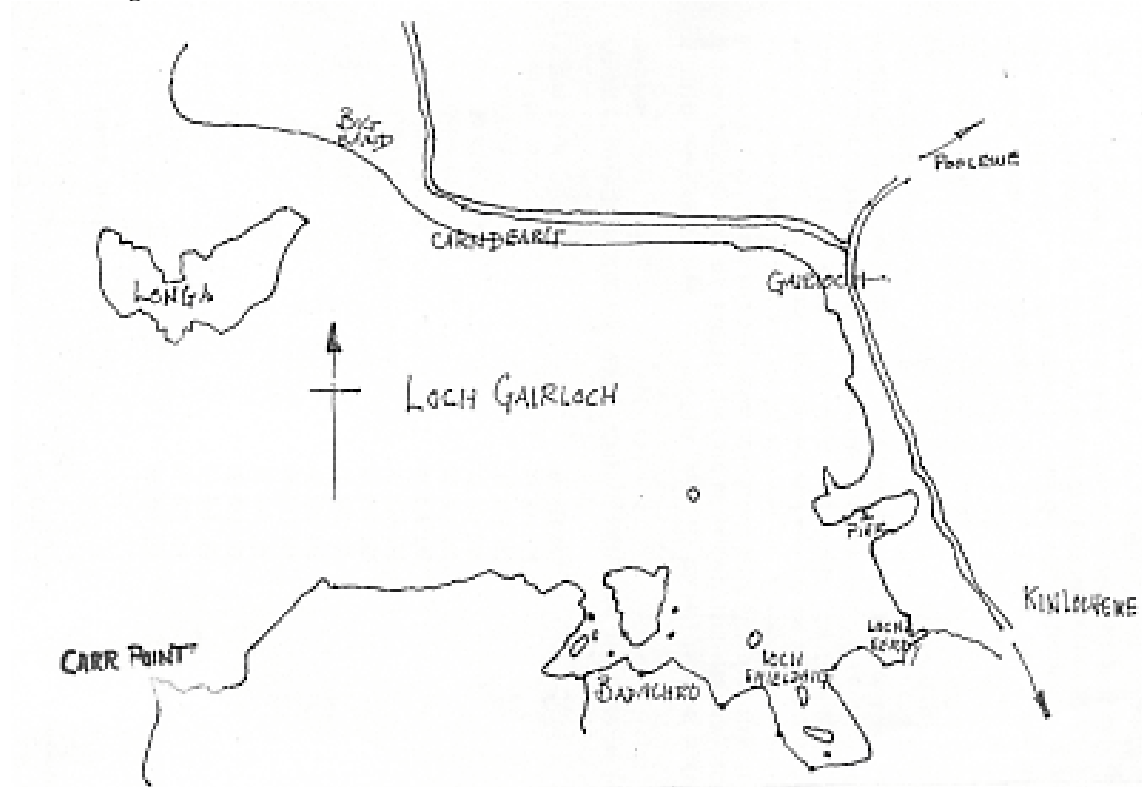
Moving east from the opposite side of the loch climb the slope up to **Loch na Curra**, a medium size, open loch. The boat is at the opposite end but shore fishing along the west bank can be productive. The fish are generally smaller than the previous loch but plentiful. If fishing from the boat the west bank and the centre of the southeast end can produce some nice bags of fine fat trout.

To get back you can retrace your track or carry on southeast moving up to the flank of the hill on your right, a line of short stakes can be followed back to the Poolewe road and Loch Tollaidh.

Loch nan Liagh, follow the track towards **Loch Bad a' Chreamh** and bear off west north west across the burn and make towards a cleft in the hill in front, past the remains of an old shieling. Make for the burn coming out between the hills and follow it up to the loch, a biggish boggy loch with a big head of small fish, always worth a try though.

You never know what you will find. Red Throated Diver was on it the day I was there. A rough walk across a mass of peat hags leads to **Loch an Easgair** on your right, you could see all the lochs from that peat bog

Sea Fishing



Gairloch is a noted loch for sea fishing. Over the years records and specimen fish have been caught in Gairloch, these include dabs of over 2 ½ lb, a plaice of 10 lb, plus turbot over 20 lb, megrims of 2 ½ lb and many other first class fish. Haddock is the popular local choice, but cod and whiting are caught, the whole range of flat fish including sole and various rays. During the summer mullet come into Gairloch and small bass have been caught from Big Sand beach. Coal fish and Pollack can be caught trolling along the rocks and around Longa.

The best marks are around the slopes. The deep water close in means that fish migrate into deep water during winter, although I have not tried it during the winter shore fishing would not be as productive as it is on the shallow east coast, but summer fishing is second to none. A boat would be essential to get the best out of sea fishing in the area. There is at least one local boat for hire.

Baits vary, mussel being a popular and available local bait. Razor fish and cockles do very well, especially for flat fish. During the summer mackerel strip is excellent.

Some of the hotspots are off the golf course beach in about 20 – 30 metres in the summer. Badachro, in the corner off the entrance, Nares rock for rays and off Bad an Tional in about 20 meters. On the north side all the way from Longa to Strath in about 30 meters close in, on a slack tide off Lone Mhor for flats, plaice etc. Strath bay in 30 – 35 meters for conger eel, haddock and whiting, also turbot have been caught in 40 metres off the Gairloch hotel. These took mackerel strip and mussel. Porbeagle shark come into the loch in summer, smooth hounds and dog fish are caught, sometimes a shoal of squid will cause a bit of a stir.

At all times a weather eye must be kept, bad weather can happen in minutes. It must also be remembered that Gairloch is a working port, so care must be taken not to get run down by a trawler or other working boat, also do not tie into buoys floating about in the loch, they belong to a fisherman who will not appreciate you tangling up his fishing gear. Be safe at sea, be sure you are prepared.

If in doubt, don't go. Get a weather report or ask advice locally. It is far better to be safe than sorry.

The visitor will find that a 6 foot boat rod, 25 lb breaking strain nylon and either a multiplying or centre pin reel are adequate for most sea fishing in and around Gairloch. As the tides are not too bad, a 4 to 6 oz sinker is enough. Hooks are a personal choice but for flats a round bend fine wire Aberdeen and for general purpose a forged stainless steel O' Shaughnessay style hook. I avoid the chromed, snelled and slashed, so called bait hooks like the plague. A simple one or two hook rig is sufficient for most types of angling, though four to six mackerel feathers is handy. Tackle is available at some local shops, bait can be picked or dug in most places around the shore. The harbour and Poolewe can be good for lugworm, Poolewe and Inverasdale for cockles.

Safety

All anglers should be aware of the inherent dangers of fishing, not only to themselves but to others.

Wear head and eye protection, particularly when casting in windy conditions. Look behind before casting. Keep rods and lines away from overhead power cables.

In an electrical storm, cease fishing, put the rod down and move well away from it.

While wading in difficult conditions use a wading stick and always have one foot firmly on the river bed before moving the other. Wear personal buoyancy aids whenever appropriate and be familiar with the location and use of other buoyancy or life saving equipment provided by the fishery owners.

Be prepared to help anyone in difficulty.

Fishing Conduct

Do not walk into or cut across another person's fishing and avoid unnecessary wading.

Give consideration to anglers on the opposite bank

Make sure you can distinguish between take-able and non-take-able fish.

Where there are no bag limits, exercise restraint in the number of fish taken, particularly when fish are easily caught. Accept that blank days are part of the experience of fishing.

Acknowledge considerate behaviour by other legitimate water users. Follow the country code, particularly in relation to control of dogs, the risk of fires and fastening gates.

Wear unobtrusive clothing and respect the peace of the countryside.

Do not park vehicles so that they obstruct gateways or cause a hazard on the road.

Support the organisations which safeguard your sport.