

In brief

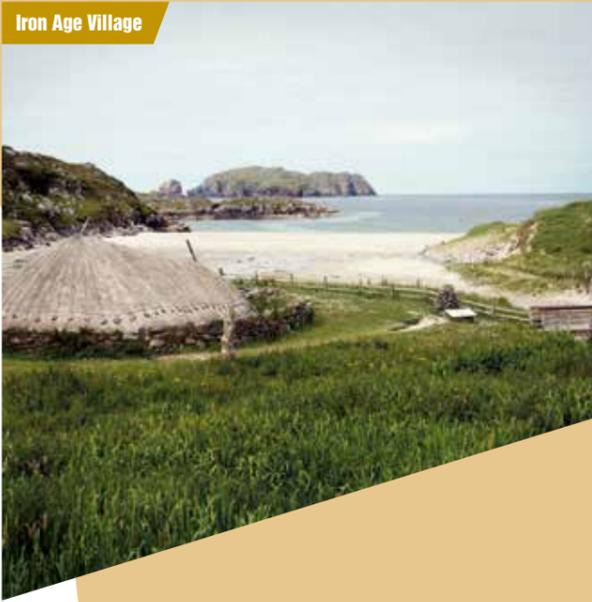
Category: moderate walk

Walking Distance: 12km / 7.5 miles

Time: allow four and a half hours

Map Reference: OS Landranger 13 and Pathfinder NB 13 / 23 and NB 14 / 24

Iron Age Village



Experience Life on the Edge
www.visitouterhebrides.co.uk



Explore the rest of our Hebridean Walks!

How to get there?

By Car

Parking is available at the start of the walk at Bernera Community Centre, Breacleit. There is no space for parking further along the route at Bhalasaigh.

By Bus

Local bus services are available from Stornoway and Gearraidh na h-Aibhne daily except Sunday.

For details contact the Stornoway bus station. Tel: 01851 704327 or the Tourist Information Centre Tel: 01851 703088.

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.

“Today, the people of Bernera earn their livelihoods by fishing, fishfarming, weaving, tourism-related work and commuting to jobs in Stornoway.”



Explore...

From the community centre, follow the Tacleit (Hacklete) road for 1.25km (0.75 mile), until the turn-off to Bhalasaigh (Valasay) on the right. Continue to the end of Bhalasagh road, over the footbridge crossing Tob Bhalasaigh, and then, past the first cottage. As you approach the second house turn right through three gates.

Follow the waymarkers along the west coast of the island (taking care to avoid the geos and sea-caves which are inaccessible from land) to an old track which will lead you towards the village of Tobson.

Turn left when you reach the road at Tobson, then left again. A little further on turn right through the gate and follow the waymarkers up Beinn an Toib, enjoying spectacular views over Loch Roag and the islands to the west. The route continues through a gate in the stone wall, and down through the beautiful valley and deserted village of Bostadh, to one of Lewis's loveliest beaches. The remains of a late Iron Age village can also be seen here, and a reconstructed Iron Age House.

Continue to the single track tarmac road at Bostadh, and follow its winding course for 4.5km along the rocky shore and through croftland and moorland and along the delightful banks of Loch na Muilne. At the crossroads to Tobson, pause to consider the memorial to the Bernera Riots, before returning to the Community Centre at Breacleit. Make sure you visit the local Museum at the centre (open April – September, with small admission charge) and have some refreshments in the Centre Café before you leave.

Alternatively, you can be picked up by the local bus which calls at Bostadh twice a day on request in the summer months. To Contact Stornoway Bus Station on 01851 704327 or enquire at the Community Centre, Breacleit.

Public toilets are available all year round at Bostadh and during the season at the Community Centre.



Bhalasaigh Footbridge

Bhalasaigh

Tob Bhalasaigh has been designated as a priority site of special scientific interest, as a sheltered lagoon with a rare mixture of seaweeds only found in this unusual mix of salt and fresh water.

The footbridge was built in 1898 to serve isolated families on the other side of the Tob. It is still difficult to carry all life's necessities over the bridge, especially in bad weather. Some families

have since built new houses on the near side of the bridge, but the ruins of their deserted dwellings can still be seen.

The shore is a place where Otters are frequently seen, both in the Tob and along the seashore. To the west, the views of Rìof sands and the intervening islands are unforgettable. These small islands were all inhabited until the middle years of the nineteenth century when they were cleared for sheep farms.



Ringed Plover

Tobson

As you walk along the Tobson shore you will notice stone ruins. On the shore are boat slips and lobster ponds, which were enclosures where live Lobsters were stored until conditions and prices were at their best. Some were communally owned, some by individual fishermen. Further on above the shore are the remains of curing houses where catches of Ling were dried and salted for export, largely to the Baltic.

The Ling fishing collapsed during the First World War and never recovered. Follow the old track from the shore into the village of Tobson, which is the oldest continuously inhabited township in Bernera. The other villages were either cleared or resettled during the nineteenth century.

Today, in common with the rest of Bernera, the people earn their livelihoods by fishing, fishfarming, weaving, tourism-related work and commuting to jobs in Stornoway. Crofting continues to be a part-time occupation, as it always has.

Bostadh

The cliffs where Tobson and Bostadh meet is a nesting place for Shags and Cormorants. Fulmars and Gannets can be seen fishing, and Razorbills and Guillemots are plentiful in spring and autumn. The huge flat boulders along the shore were scoured by ice during the last Ice Age, as were the U-shaped valleys that run south-west to north-east throughout Bernera. Around the shore of Loch Sgeal it is common to see Sandpipers, Redshank and Golden Plovers. Ringed Plovers nest at Bostadh. The rare Great Northern Diver is present during the summer nesting season.

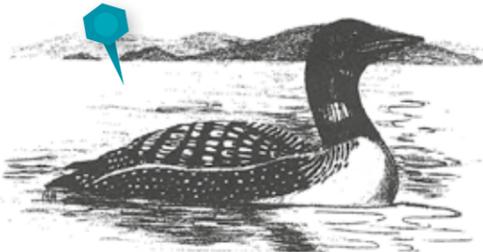
The ruined blackhouses through the glen were built at various times from the Middle Ages onwards. The village was finally abandoned in 1878 when the last of the peat, used for fuel, was exhausted. Most families went to nearby Circebost, but some emigrated to Canada.

During the Napoleonic wars, the inhabitants burnt kelp in long trenches to produce a source of alkaline. Although this was heavy work, it produced a rare means to earn cash for rents.

The islands out from the shore were never inhabited, except for the flat island of Beirisaidh. The famous outlaw Neil MacLeod was besieged there in 1612. The authorities forced him to give himself up by stranding his wife and children on one of the skerries at low tide.

In summer when the sheep are removed, the machair explodes into flower; Harebells, Yarrow, Orchids, Milkwort, Butterwort and so on. Lime-loving flowers that are uncommon elsewhere in Bernera are seen here, including Vetches, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Lime Bugloss and Purging Flax.

The cemetery was first used in 1906. Before then burials took place on the offshore island of Little Bernera.



Diver

Iron Age Village

Bostadh has been inhabited since prehistoric times. In 1993 a severe storm exposed a late Iron Age village which had lain concealed below the machair.

Archaeological excavations revealed a series of interlocking drystone houses which had no windows or chimneys. In each house a long low entrance passage led to a large circular room with an open hearth in the centre, with one or more other rooms opening off it.

The resourceful inhabitants made their living by a little mixed farming, fishing, and

hunting the wild deer and seabirds.

Abundant evidence of their daily life, the crafts they practiced around the fireside and their religious observances were also found. The village may have been first occupied more than 1,500 years ago, at the start of the Pictish period. At the end of its life, a Viking house was built over the ruins of the earlier village.

Remains of three of the houses can be seen on the original site. A life-size reconstruction of one of these remarkable semi-subterranean houses has been built nearby.



Reconstruction Drawing

Crothair – Breacleit

Continue eastwards along the tarmac road from the cemetery. From the top of the rise you can see the Flannan Isles out to sea, and across to the west side of Lewis. At the bottom of the hill is the oldest inhabited house in Bernera, built in 1883. This was part of the village of Crothair which was cleared in 1880 to make way for a sheep farm. Crothair was resettled to make a crofting township in the 1920s.



Birdsfoot Trefoil



Yarrow

The road crosses a stream draining from Loch na Muilne (Mill Loch). A little distance downstream are the remains of a ruined water mill. This loch is good for trout fishing and has resident mallard duck. It is also a favourite place for Grey Herons to fish.

The cairn at Tobson crossroads commemorates the Bernera Rioters who won a famous legal battle against the landowner in 1874. Buzzards nest in the rocks to the east of the cairn. On the right hand further on, Highland cattle are pastured on a re-seeded area.

Bernera Community

Bernera and its outlying islands were owned by the late Count Robin de la Lanne Mirrlees, who lived on the island. The population, some 275 (including the three villages on the south side of the bridge), has a strong sense of community.

The community centre is used for ceilidhs, wedding receptions, carpet bowls and many other activities.

The Church of Scotland, primary school, shop, Post Office and the Doctor's surgery are all located in Breacleit.

A small number of Fishing boats operate out of Circebost harbour and fish-farming and tourism are developing industries.

An increasing number of people commute to Stornoway to their place of work.

