

A stunning circular walk in Great Bernera, including a visit to the Iron Age village remains and Iron Age house reconstruction at Bostadh / Bosta beach.

The route starts at the community centre (with museum and cafe) at Breacleit / Breaclete, where you can park, and follows along to the road end in Bhalasaigh / Valasay. Once over the footbridge the route is waymarked until eventually you arrive at the village of Tobson. From Tobson the route continues to be waymarked up Beinn an Toib and then down to the reconstructed Iron Age house at Bostadh. From Bostadh, the route continues along the road back to the start at Breacleit.

Bhalasaigh / Valasay

1 From the community centre turn right and walk along the road towards Hacklete until you come to Bhalasaigh, where you turn right and continue to end of the village. Head over the footbridge crossing Tob Bhalasaigh, and then, past the first cottage. As you approach the second house turn right through three gates.

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, there are fantastic views of Rìof sands in Uig.

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

Iron Age House



Bostadh / Bosta

3 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. There are public toilets here which are open all year round.

The cliffs where Tobson and Bostadh meet is a nesting place for Shags and Cormorants, where 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.

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 Kirkibost, but some emigrated to Canada.

Iron Age village

4 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.

Crothair / Croir

5 Continue eastwards along the tarmac road from the cemetery at Bostadh. 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.

The road crosses a stream draining from Loch na Muilne (Mill Loch). This loch is a

favourite place for Grey Herons to fish.

The cairn at the Tobson junction 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. Continue on the road back to Breaclete to returning to the start at the community centre where there is a museum, café and public toilets.

Redshank



Tobson

2 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

Turn left when you reach the road at Tobson, then left again. A little further on turn right through the gate and follow the way markers up Beinn an Toib, enjoying spectacular views over Loch Roag and the islands to the west.

