

THE CHALLENGE...

Paddle the length of Loch Awe

The route can be started at either end

DISTANCE: 25 miles

START FROM: Torran Bay Hostel (there is a small fee for launching/landing from their car park). On leaving the small bay, head north east. The easiest route is following the eastern shore line, cutting across the many bays and headlands to shorten the trip. En route, you pass many small islands and there is plenty of stunning scenery to take in.

FINISH: Just past Kilchurn Castle, a welcome sight after 25 miles! You can paddle right up to the castle (watch out, the water can get shallow on the approach), get out at the jetty and walk around this historic landmark. Because it's a half-mile walk from the castle to the car park, we recommend getting back in your boat and paddling to the right around the headland and up the mouth of the river. Get out in the bay under the railway bridge on the right hand side.



Torran Bay Hostel (launch/landing point)



Kilchurn Castle



Railway bridge launch/landing point near Kilchurn Castle

Map key

Canoe route	Car park
Ferry route	Tourist information
Railway	Camping
Main road	Fuel/Services
Minor road	Public convenience
Waterway	National Trust
Woodland	Forestry Commission
Built-up area	Meeting point
Launch/landing point	

THE CHALLENGE: Paddle the length of Loch Awe.

Distance: 25 Miles

Time: 4-9 hours (approx)

OVERVIEW:

This is our most difficult challenge route that will test your endurance and skills to the limits, but is a real gem if you are the sort of person who enjoys escaping on an adventure. Loch Awe is the longest freshwater loch in Scotland. Located in the Argyll and Bute region of West Scotland, its shoreline stretches to within a few miles of the sea. In our opinion Loch Awe is a contender as one of the most spectacular lochs to paddle, due to its rugged remoteness and stunning surrounding landscape.

The shores are fringed with conifer forests and the northern horizon is dominated by the Ben Cruachan mountain range. Wildlife in the area is legendary and if you are lucky you may spot deer, otters, golden eagles or ospreys from the water. Have we mentioned there are also castles you can paddle up to and explore? The sights from the water on this challenge are hard to beat, and it's not until you are out in the middle of this vast loch that you will truly appreciate its scale and beauty.

With careful, sensible planning and ensuring you follow safety guidance this is truly an awesome challenge to take on and an amazing area to visit. Good luck and make sure you read all of the information below before embarking on your adventure!

Please Note: *The distances for our challenge routes are rounded up to the nearest mile. The distance you cover on the water will vary depending on the exact course your journey takes. The time to complete the challenges will depend on a number of factors including fitness levels, ability, stopping times and craft used. We have calculated the guidance times by assuming a leisurely pace in a recreational craft may travel at around 3mph and a fast pace in a racing craft may travel around 7mph.*

ABOUT LOCH AWE:

Loch Awe is the most testing of the challenge routes, not only because of the length of the route, but also due to its remote surroundings, lack of local amenities and potentially harsh environment.

The loch is very deep and is reported as the coldest of all Scottish lochs, particularly during the winter and spring as it is fed by snow melt water. On a map it looks narrow but don't be deceived, this is an optical illusion due to the sheer length of the loch. On average it is about one kilometre wide, and at the north of the loch it opens up into a vast exposed stretch of water.

The wind and weather can change quickly in this area, so it is particularly important to be aware of weather forecasts before setting off. On still days, the water can be like glass with the only ripples coming from the movement of your boat or local wildlife. But on windy days, like all stretches of open water, it can get very rough.

The loch has several small islands; one in particular to look out for is Innis Chonnell which contains the ruins of Ardchonnell Castle. The castle dates back to the 11th Century and belonged to the chief of Clan Campbell. It is said that the saying "It's a far cry to Lochow" came from here, since they often launched attacks from this island.

ROUTE DETAILS:

The Challenge Route can be completed in either direction, however the following is written starting at Torran Bay Hostel and finishing just past Kilchurn Castle. We recommend finishing at Kilchurn Castle as it provides a fabulous ending and a beautiful back drop for completion of the 25 miles. However, it is advisable to take into account the wind direction when choosing which direction to travel.

Start/ Finish locations

Torran Bay Hostel

Torran Ford

Lochgilphead

Argyll,

PA31 8RH

Grid reference: NM 87555 04584

www.torran-bay.co.uk

Kilchurn Castle

Lochawe

Dalmally

Argyll and Bute,

PA33 1AF

Grid reference: NN 13871 27967

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk

The car park at Kilchurn Castle can be difficult to spot from the road. There are no signs and it can easily be mistaken as a driveway. To help identify it, there are small white posts either side of the entrance. Please note that it is a basic parking place with no amenities.

ROUTE DESCRIPTION:

Start from Torran Bay Hostel car park at the southern end of the Loch. The hostel will charge a small fee for launching from their car park, which is payable at reception. Although there is a charge the owner of the hostel is very friendly, accommodating and welcoming to paddlers.

On leaving the small bay in front of the hostel, paddle north east. The easiest route is following the eastern shore line, cutting across the many bays and headlands to shorten the trip (weather permitting). En route you'll pass many small islands and plenty of stunning scenery.

Approximately eight and half miles into the route (depending on the exact route you take), you will see Innes Chonnell Island. It is the last of a set of four islands located just off the east side of the loch. Although most of the ruins are now covered in heather, you should still be able to see the top and outline of the ruins from the water.

You are allowed to land at Innis Chonnell and explore if you would like to.

After passing Innes Chonnell Island stay on the eastern shoreline as it bends gradually round to the left. If the water is still and you have a slight tail wind then taking the most direct route cutting across sections of the loch that bend in the central section would be the most advantageous. However, if the wind is against you or the loch is rough, then it may be better to paddle closer to the shoreline to shelter from the wind.

As you start to approach the northern section of the loch, it slowly starts to widen and a large cluster of islands will appear on the horizon. Head towards this first set of islands and pass on the best side to gain any shelter from the wind. From here it is about 3 miles to the end of the loch and a smaller cluster of islands will be in sight. This section is by far the widest and most open section of the loch. Keep heading north east towards this final set of islands and towards the end of the loch. Once you have passed the islands the loch will start to narrow again and take you into the final stretch of your journey.

As you near the end, the spectacular and welcome sight of Kilchurn Castle will start to come into view. Head towards the castle, where you will see a long landing jetty positioned to the right of the castle. You can choose to get out here and walk around the castle grounds, taking in the sights, before heading back to the car park. The section of water directly in front of the castle can be very shallow in places, so please take care when approaching and ensure that it is deep enough to navigate.

It is possible to walk from the castle to the car park; however this is approximately a ½ mile walk. We therefore recommend getting back in your boat at the jetty and paddling around the headland, up the mouth of the River Orchy, towards the railway bridge. Get out in a bay on the right hand bank just under the railway bridge and follow a subtle trodden path, back to the car park (approx. 150m).

We hope you enjoy the unique experience of paddling beautiful Loch Awe!

PLANNING AND SAFETY ADVICE:

It is important to consider all aspects of the challenge when planning your trip; from choosing the appropriate equipment, logistics and itinerary to your support crew, fellow paddlers, nutritional and hydration requirements.

Firstly, you must be confident of your canoeing ability and experience. Make sure this challenge route is the right one for you. It should be challenging yet achievable without putting yourself or others at unnecessary risk. We wouldn't recommend inexperienced paddlers taking on this challenge without the support and guidance from competent and experienced paddlers.

When planning what type of craft to complete the challenge in, you need to ensure it is suitable for the environment and conditions you will encounter, bearing in mind weather conditions can change quickly and without warning. Due to Loch Awe being so vast it is very exposed and prone to getting rough when it's windy. It is important that you feel confident in your boat in choppy/wavy conditions. If you are a racing paddler, who usually paddles a K1 we would suggest looking at a slightly more stable and higher volume boat and have a pump onboard, potentially even using a sea kayak if conditions are rough. Paddling on such a large lake can present very different conditions to a river or canal. We recommend that you have some experience of paddling your chosen craft on open water before undertaking the challenge.

If doing this challenge as part of the Three Lakes Challenge bear in mind that tiredness can affect your stability levels, as the challenge goes on you will become more tired and will get an advantage from feeling comfortable in a boat that has greater stability, particularly if weather conditions are windy. When navigating the lake we advise you stay close to the shore line, so that if you do get into difficulty you aren't far from the bank. However be aware that in places it is shallow near the lochs shores. Paddle sensibly according to the conditions you experience.

Having a support crew is advisable for this challenge, particularly if you are attempting to complete Loch Awe as part of the Three Lakes Challenge. You should schedule a number of stops in order to have breaks to refuel and rehydrate. This would also give you the opportunity to have a quick stretch of your legs, see some friendly faces and make a change of clothes if needed. Some potential meeting points for your support crew are marked on the map with an 'MP' symbol.

When planning your itinerary, consider staying in the area for a few days, perhaps combining it with a holiday. As it is such a beautiful place this wouldn't be too much of a hardship! Then, if weather or water conditions are bad on the day/ days you planned to complete the challenge, you have the option to postpone your paddle without missing out on the opportunity altogether or putting yourself at unnecessary risk.

It is useful for your support crew to have some binoculars so they can spot you in the distance and keep track of your progress.

If you plan on completing the challenge in a more leisurely style, you may wish to consider a slight detour to the small village of Dalavich which sits on the west side of the loch. It does add a little extra distance on to the route, but it could provide the opportunity for a comfort break, a cup of tea, or even overnight accommodation allowing you to complete the trip over two days. This is the only village along the shore of the loch that offers local amenities all in one location including a shop, cafe (including a toilet) and places to stay.

There are limited local amenities and public transport near the loch itself, so it is best to ensure you have bought supplies en route and filled the car with plenty of fuel. It is also worth noting that phone reception is not very good in the area. (In many places you may not be able to get signal at all). Due to this we would recommend that VHF radios would be a good alternative to carry between the support crew and paddlers on the water. There is limited radio signal whilst driving, so it is advisable to take a good supply of CDs, a good book or connections to portable media players in the car to keep the support crew entertained!

At certain times of the year there are a huge amount of midges around Loch Awe. They do bite any exposed skin and are very irritating due to the sheer number of them. Ensure that you take some insect repellent spray, consider the clothing you will wear and potentially take a midge head net.

It is important be aware of the threats the environment can present, particularly in bad weather and be sensible with the decisions you make.

To help make sure you remain safe at all times, consider the following safety advice when taking part in the Challenge Routes.

- Wear appropriate clothing- ensure you always wear shoes and a buoyancy aid. Also consider additional dry clothing, layered items, lightweight waterproofs, sun cream and hat.
- Know the weather forecast before you set out canoeing, take account of water levels, flow and weather conditions. Remember to be prepared for this to change, sometimes very quickly and without warning. If in doubt of ability to deal with the weather conditions leave the trip for another day.
- Ensure your equipment is in good condition, you know how to use it correctly and your boat has sufficient buoyancy.
- Carry a small first aid kit, drinking water and food.
- If completing this lake as part of the three lakes challenge, make sure you have a support crew and drive sensibly between the lakes. We do not take driving times into account; it's the time on the water that counts and we record on our leader boards.
- Make sure the journey you plan is within your paddling capabilities and schedule planned stops to eat and drink.
- Do not paddle alone
- Have a map of the lake/area with you on the boat. OS maps are recommended.
- Leave details of your trip with a responsible person including when you expect to return.
- Follow safety recommendations provided
- Ensure you are confident in the type of boat you are paddling and it is appropriate for the type of water you will encounter when out on the lake. When offering assistance to those in need, on or off the water, do not put yourself or fellow canoeists at risk.
- Carry some form of communication such as mobile phone or radio.
- When offering assistance to those in need, on or off the water, do not put yourself or fellow canoeists at risk.

AREA INFORMATION:

There is a small shop called 'Loch Awe Stores' at the northern end of the loch on the A85 near the train station. The roads on both sides of the loch are single track tarmac roads, which can take between 1- 1

½ hours to drive, end to end. The suggested route for the support crew to follow is the B840 which runs along the eastern side of the loch. This road follows the shoreline along the majority of the way, making the loch visible and allowing the support crew to easily track your progress on the water. There are a few places along the road which will provide your support crew with places to park close to the loch's edge so they can cheer you on or meet up with you to provide support, food, drink and dry clothes if needed. One stop can be found at just under 11 miles and another at just under 16. The first stop is a small beach area and the second is a pier just past the hotel at South Port. Be aware that, depending on the line you paddle, these distances could be slightly different. Please be careful that your support crew do not block or misuse passing places whilst on this road.

Loch Awe Safety Group

www.lapb.org.uk

Loch Awe Safety Code of Practice

www.lapb.org.uk/further_info/LOCH_AWE_SAFETY_CODE_OF_PRACTICE_OCT_2013.pdf

Loch Awe Community website

www.loch-awe.com

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Help minimise the spread of invasive aquatic species and disease by following the **CHECK, CLEAN, DRY** campaign before putting your canoe and equipment in and out of the water (some invasive species can survive in damp or wet conditions for five or six days on water recreation clothing and equipment).

- CHECK:** Check all your equipment and clothing for living organisms and plant fragments. Pay particular attention to areas that are damp and hard to inspect.
- CLEAN:** Clean and wash all equipment, clothing and footwear thoroughly, away from the water source. If you do come across any organisms, leave them at the water body where you found them.
- DRY:** When practical, completely dry out all equipment and clothing before going to a new site. Dry all equipment and clothing - some species can live for many days in moist conditions. Dry your kit with towels. Make sure you don't transfer water elsewhere.

- Familiarise yourself with the local area, noting its sensitive places, protected areas and breeding seasons.
- Leave the environment as you found it and take your litter home with you.
- Keep noise to a minimum.
- Do not damage bankside vegetation when launching or landing.
- Do not 'seal' launch or drag boats to avoid damage to the natural banks. Where possible keep to designated paths or launching points.
- Respect the freshwater and marine environment.
- Avoid paddling over gravel banks in low water conditions, as they may contain fish spawn.
- Paddle a safe distance away from wildlife to avoid causing disturbance and stress
- Constantly assess wildlife. If you see signs of disturbance move away quickly.

CONSIDERATION TO OTHERS

- Show consideration to other water users and treat them with courtesy and respect.
- Be aware that permission may be required to cross private land.
- Stay away from houses and private gardens.
- Change discreetly, using public facilities where possible.
- Drive sensibly at all times.
- Car parking - do not obstruct roads, passing places or entrances to buildings or farm property.
- Ensure your kit does not cause an obstruction when unloading.
- Leave gates positioned and property as you find it.
- Avoid damage to fences and walls.
- Show consideration to organised bank side activities, and give way as required to on-water events.
- Keep a look out for anglers while paddling. Anglers can be hard to spot on banks. Co-operate to avoid lines, nets, and swims. If it is unclear where to pass lines or swims, then quietly attract the attention of the angler and agree a route to follow.
- When an angler is playing a fish from the bank or wading, stop some way off and await their acknowledgement to proceed.
- Do not linger in pools or swims occupied by an angler.

We have taken great care to ensure the currency, accuracy and reliability of this information. We cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions but where such are brought to our attention; the information will be amended accordingly. Users should be aware that environmental conditions outside of our control can change the nature of the route within a short space of time. It is recommended that weather and water conditions are checked beforehand, and tide timetables where applicable.

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