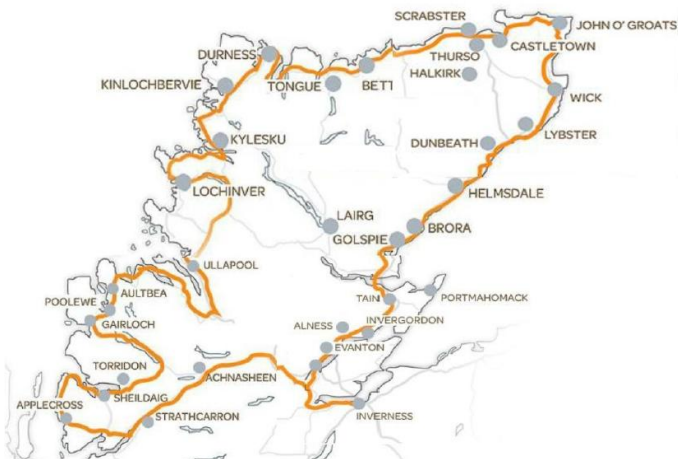




North Coast 500

The NC500 was created in 2014 by the North Highland Initiative as a tourism venture to support isolated parts of Scotland. The route is more than 500 miles of remote stretches of road in stunning areas of the North Highlands which have become a major tourism attraction for visitors to Scotland with stunning scenery and places to visit, plus excellent accommodation, food and drink. Whilst the NC500 has generated "substantial benefits" for the economy and communities of the North Highlands, it has also brought challenges. The route has become popular.



NC500 route

The route takes you on a network of roads around the Highland's west, north and west coasts from Inverness. The route described below is **clockwise around the Highlands** starting and ending in Inverness.

Route from Inverness to Ullapool



Inverness

Inverness is a city on Scotland's northeast coast, where the River Ness meets the Moray Firth. It's the largest city and the cultural capital of the Scottish Highlands. Its Old Town features the 19th-century Inverness Cathedral, the mostly 18th-century Old High Church and an indoor Victorian Market selling food, clothing and crafts. The contemporary Inverness Museum and Art Gallery traces local and Highland history. To the east of Inverness are three interesting places to visit - Culloden (the site of the Battle of Culloden in April 1746), Cawdor Castle (famous for its Macbeth connection) and Fort George, an 18th century military fort still with the army active there, overlooking the Moray Firth with the Black Isle beyond.



Kessock Bridge

The A9 trunk road from Inverness northwards goes over a bridge built in the 1980s which replaced a car ferry. As you cross the bridge, to the left is the Beaulie Firth. At a roundabout to the north near Tore you turn left on to the A835 heading west for Mayburgh and Garve. You pass the Black Water Falls just beyond Loch Garve and then soon bear left on the A832 heading for **Achnasheen**.

Achnasheen

On the route to Achnasheen on the A832 you have the Highland railway from Inverness alongside heading for Kyle of Lochalsh and you pass Loch Luichart on the left. At a roundabout in Achnasheen the road to Strathcarron bears left on the A890 and then passes the Ledgowan

Hotel, a welcoming place for a break or overnight stop. If you go straight on at the roundabout on A832 that will take you down the long road to Kinlochewe.

Lochcarron

The NC500 route on the A890 goes down the long glen to a T junction near the head of Loch Carron. Here the road to the left (A890) takes you to the hamlet of Achintee and also the beautiful Attadale Gardens. Going straight on at the junction on the A896 takes you to Lochcarron, a scenic, linear village stretching along the northern shore of a sea loch of the same name. It's a popular gateway for exploring the dramatic Torridon mountains, the Applecross peninsula and for the touring on the NC500.

Leaving Lochcarron village you soon pass Kishorn village and then reach a turning with a bold sign to the **Bealach na Ba – the famous Pass of the Cattle** that goes over to the remote village of **Applecross**.



Applecross

It's on the west coast of the Scottish Highlands, located on a peninsula in Wester Ross, and is famous for its "end of the world" feel, stunning sandy bay and access via the steep twisting road – the historic Bealach na Bà.



The Applecross Inn on the sea front provides a friendly service, fabulous food and drink and comfortable accommodation. There are lovely views across the Inner

Sound of Raasay, to the isles of Raasay and the distant Cuillin mountains on Skye

Sheildaig

Leaving Applecross on the minor coastal road takes you round the north of the peninsula to join the A839 again just south of Sheildaig. Then along the south side of Loch Torridon you reach **Torridon** village. Travelling further east you reach **Kinlochewe** on the A832.

Wester Ross Trail

The route north takes you alongside the beautiful Loch Maree on the Wester Ross Trail and on the attractive A832 coastline passing Gairloch, Poolewe, Altbea and Dundonnell near the head of Little Loch Broom. The Dundonnell Hotel is a welcoming place for refreshment and an overnight stay. Going further east you reach the Falls of Merasach by the **Braemore Junction** where the route joins the main A835 road from Inverness to **Ullapool** via Garve.

Ullapool

Ullapool is a large village and port that sits on a deep sea loch, Loch Broom, so has a significant natural harbour. Its port is regionally significant with ferries operated by Caledonian MacBrayne running from Ullapool to Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. It also serves leisure craft, commercial fishing vessels and cruise ships. It's located about 55 miles northwest of Inverness on the A835 road from Inverness to Durness.

Route from Lochinver, Durness, John O'Groats and back to Inverness



Wild Assynt and the North

North of Ullapool is Assynt, a remote and wild landscape in the North West Highlands with many spectacular views across wild moorland to remarkable mountains like Quinag, Canisp and Suilven (above). Viewed from different vantage points, these mountains can seem mysterious and weirdly-shaped as they peer above the skyline. Always vast, this landscape can change – sometimes intimidating but then with another weather change it can have a breath-taking beauty.

After 10 miles (16km) heading north on the long climb out of Ullapool on the A835, you have an option of a left turn for a short drive to the west to Achiltibuie and back on a good single track road. It runs below two mountains, Cul Beg and Stac Polliadh, and has views out to the Summer Isles just off the north side of the approach to Loch Broom.

Ledmore

Further north on the A835 at the Ledmore junction the route then goes left on the A837 through one of the few parts of the Highlands where there are large areas of exposed limestone. This has resulted in the presence of numerous cave systems including some of the largest underground cave networks in Scotland.

Inchnadamph

At Inchnadamph there is a hotel that is popular with fishing enthusiasts and just beyond Inchnadamph there is a junction – to the right the A894 road goes to **Kylesku** and the distinctively curved award-winning concrete box girder bridge that crosses the narrows there at a high level. The bridge is on your route north via the A894 to **Durness** near Cape Wrath and **Tongue** at the top of mainland Scotland.



If you go straight on at the junction to the north of Inchnadamph on the A837 you soon reach the fishing port of **Lochinver**. From there the route then goes north on the A894 via the village of Scourie on the west coast to **Durness**. On the way a diversion to the west for a walk in to a beautiful sand beach – **Sandwood Bay**- is well worth enjoying



Sandwood Bay

It's one of the most remote and beautiful beaches in Scotland, about 5 miles (8 km) south of Cape Wrath with Am Buachaille, a sea stack nearby. The walking route is on a trail that begins at the free car park in the tiny settlement of Blairmore northwest of **Kinlochbervie** on the single-track road, the B801. The walk: is 4 miles (6.4 km) taking around 1 to 2 hours each way. The trail is well-maintained and mostly flat, though it becomes narrower and slightly boggy in places. The final descent to the beach requires walking through soft sand dunes.

Durness

Durness is a breath-taking remote village on the far northwest coast of Scotland. The local highlights include the massive Smoo Cave with its underground waterfall, the sweeping white sands of Balnakeil Beach, and the quirky Balnakeil Craft Village. Durness is around 35 miles north of Lochinver on the A894 and 120 miles north of Inverness.

Narrow single track roads with passing places

In the Highlands and particularly in the north of Sutherland the route is often on narrow single track roads with passing places, so travelling at modest speeds allowing other drivers to pass by pausing in passing places is a relaxed way of enjoying the route and scenery.





Do avoid driving in convoys with other classic cars as this can frustrate local drivers – the convention in the Highlands on single track roads is to give way to cars behind you by pulling over at passing places. Cars grouped in convoys can block passing places.

Tongue

To the east of Durness is Tongue a remote coastal village in northwest Sutherland on the east shore of the Kyle of Tongue. It's surrounded by rugged mountains like Ben Hope and Ben Loyal and is a popular stop on the NC500.

Thurso

It's about 70 miles from **Tongue to Thurso** along the northern edge of the Highlands. The route is largely single-track with passing places. A stop at the Wolfburn Distillery, Scotland's most northerly mainland distillery, for a tour and tasting or a stop at the local visitor centre in the town centre to explore the Viking and Neolithic history of the region is welcome. Just north of Thurso is the port of Scrabster with ferries regularly crossing the Pentland Firth to and from Orkney.



The Castle of Mey

The former much-loved summer home of the late Queen Mother is an enjoyable visit with a tour of the beautiful gardens and the castle. It's east of the small village of Dunnet on the A836 from Thurso to **John O'Groats**.



John O'Groats & Duncansby Head

In the far north East of the Highlands is a minor public road that leads from John O' Groats to Duncansby Head, which makes Duncansby Head the farthest point by road from Land's End. It's also the most north-easterly point of the British mainland.



Flow Country

Wick

Taking the single-track road from Duncansby Head to the A99 you then head south directly into Wick. The route south to Helmsdale and beyond on the A9 has wide views all the way out to the east over the North Sea.

Helmsdale is where the A897 from Melvick on the north coast and via the Forsinard Peatlands centre in the heart of the **Flow Country**, joins the A9. The Flow Country is a large rolling expanse of peatland and wetland in Caithness and Sutherland that makes up almost 5% of the World's blanket bog capturing carbon dioxide. It's often a bleak vista with Ben Loyal in the distance to the West.

Helmsdale

The route south from Helmsdale is around 70 miles to Inverness on the A9 via Brora and Golspie, then crossing the Dornoch Firth Bridge. The route continues on the A9 and goes round Tain and south to the Cromarty Firth Bridge, then crosses the A832 at a roundabout at Tore. There is then a relatively short section to North Kessock and crossing the Kessock Bridge to reach Inverness.

Useful links & footnotes

Weather

May is usually the driest month in the Highlands receiving just 84.5mm of rain on average. [Met Office](#) & [MWIS](#)

Wester Ross Trail from Dornie to Ullapool

Driving around Wester Ross is an adventure on its own with many single track roads and breathtaking scenery with mountains like Slioch on Loch Maree.

[See our Memorable MG Route MMGR6](#) & [More](#)

Bealach Na Ba or the "Pass of the Cattle"

See photos of the route and a video link. [More](#)

Inverewe Gardens

[Link](#)

Attadale Gardens by Loch Carron

[Link](#)

Castle of Mey

[Link](#)

Visit John O'Groats

[Link](#)

North Highland Initiative launched the route

The North Coast route itself was launched in 2015 by the North Highland Initiative (NHI), a non-profit organization established by King Charles III (then the Prince of Wales) to boost economic development.

<https://www.northhighlandinitiative.co.uk/>

NC500 website

North Coast 500 Limited is the private company responsible for managing and promoting the "North Coast 500" (NC500), a famous 516 mile scenic driving route in the Scottish Highlands. The company oversees the brand, coordinates with local tourism businesses and runs initiatives to balance regional economic growth with environmental management.

<https://www.northcoast500.com/>

North Coast 500 Ltd was incorporated in 2015, and later transitioned into an independent private company. It is currently owned/backed by the billionaire-owned Wildland group. The company markets the **NC500 route - which starts and ends at Inverness Castle** - to international audiences, significantly boosting local Highland economies. It manages the registered trademark for NC500, licensing the brand name to local accommodations, tour guides and businesses. The company works alongside public bodies and local communities to track the route's impact and encourage responsible tourism.

Wildland Limited (also known as WildLand) is owned by Danish billionaire Anders Holch Povlsen and his wife.

NC500 benefits and challenges

Recent BBC News coverage on the North Coast 500 (NC500) highlights how the 516-mile scenic route generated nearly £100 million in economic benefits and supported 1,335 jobs in the Highlands. However, the BBC has also reported on mounting community concerns regarding overtourism, dangerous driver behavior, and improper waste disposal.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cwxzkl81k5rt>

The NC500 has become a popular touring route for visitors to the Highlands with some touring in a modest way but sadly a number of individual drivers or groups of drivers drive the route as though they feel it is a rally where driving at speed is necessary. With some parts of the route on single track roads that can be dangerous. More than half of the residents also said they had experienced dangerous or irresponsible driving "very often".

A report commissioned by North Coast 500 Ltd said the 516-mile (805km) scenic route generated almost £100m in economic benefit and supported 1,335 jobs in 2025.

The report has recommended that the private marketing firm work collaboratively with other organisations to "maximise" the benefits visitors bring, but also to regularly consult with communities. Almost 830 residents, 99 businesses and 617 visitors took part in the survey. The report said retail and entertainment businesses were among those to benefit from the economic boost, but challenges included an **83% increase in the number of vehicles on north Highland roads since 2014** - the year before the NC500 was first promoted.

Damage to the environment

90% of residents and 38% of visitors reported having seen signs of damage to the local environment. This included trees and branches being cut to make camp fires, road verges and paths being turned into mud, and off-road vehicles "ploughing through" grassland. The survey said 73% of visitors wanted the money they spent to benefit local people, and consultants said 6,300 visitors had so far signed a pledge aimed at encouraging responsible behaviour. Let's hope this will encourage more careful driving by tourists on the NC100.

What is the Visitor Pledge?

As more visitors have explored the iconic NC500 route, it became clear that mindful travel is key to lessening the impact on the environment and the lives of residents. Preserving the natural landscapes and supporting the local communities that make the NC500 so special is vital to create a balance between tourism and sustainability. In response the **NC500 Pledge was born as an initiative created to encourage visitors to experience the route responsibly and respectfully**. See further information on the pledge on the NC500 website.

<https://www.northcoast500.com/visitor-pledge/>