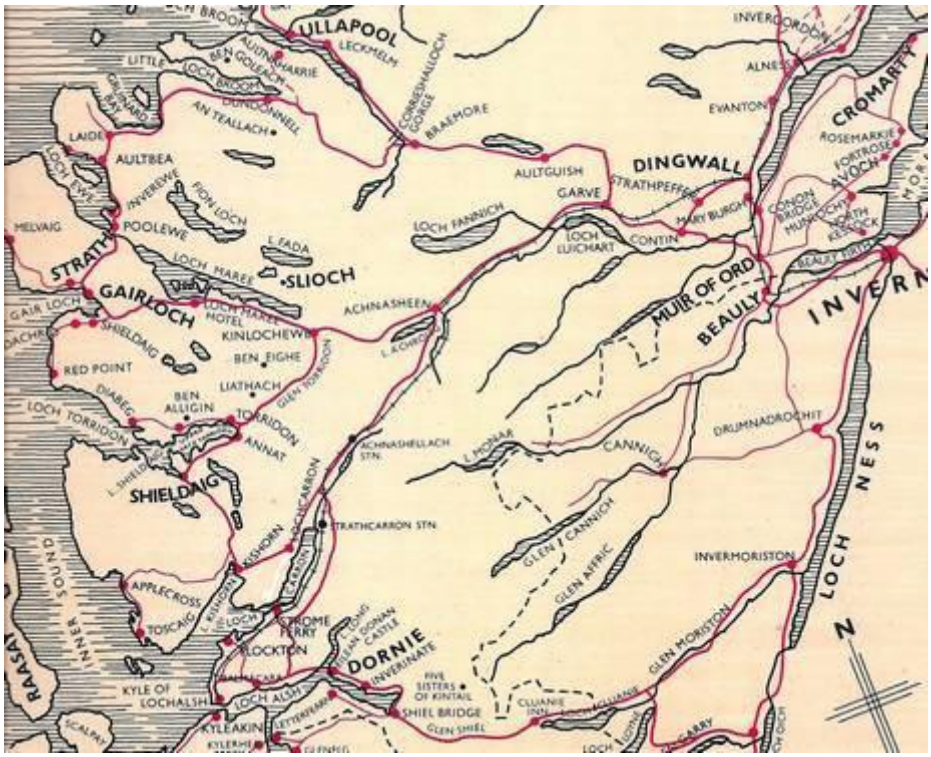

Wester Ross is a remote, lonely and wild area of outstanding natural beauty in the North West Highlands between Loch Broom and Ullapool in the north, Loch Carron in the south, the small village of Achnasheen in the east and the coast to the west. The area includes beautiful lochs like Loch Torridon with Liathach in the heart of the huge Torridon mountain range, Loch Maree with the Slioch and Beinn Eighe mountain ranges and dozens of other remote lochs in attractive glens. It's also one of the few parts of Scotland which still has the remains of the old Caledonian forest. Driving around Wester Ross is an adventure on its own with many single track roads, breathtaking scenery with huge mountains and wide views out to sea.

Clockwise route is most rewarding
A clockwise route is probably the most rewarding starting from **Dornie** on Loch Alsh, then alongside Loch Carron, but at the head of the loch there is a choice – whether to go east or west at a T junction just north of the village of **Achintee**. Going east from that junction on the A890 takes you through the broad Strathcarron to a roundabout before the village of **Achnasheen** on the A892 (the road from Inverness). There you turn hard left and head northwest for Kinlochewe.

The alternative route going west from the T junction near Achintee is via Shieldaig, (possibly with an excursion west to the remote Applecross village), Upper Loch Torridon and Glen Torridon to Kinlochewe. From Kinlochewe the circular route unfolds.

So where do you start?
The route starts by taking a route from a **well signposted junction** (see photo alongside) 3 miles west of **Dornie** on the A87 to Loch Alsh. The signpost points to Gairloch A832 and Loch Carron A890. The road climbs from the junction and heads for Stromeferry at the narrows on Loch Carron – the old ferry here has been discontinued but recently the ferry from Glenelg provided a temporary service across the narrows because a serious rockfall blocked the road for months. The road then hugs the south side of the loch alongside the Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh railway line. A pleasant refreshment break at the **Carron Restaurant** with views across the loch can be combined with a visit to the Carron Pottery and Gallery. The beautiful **Attadale Gardens** are nearby too. The route then opens up as you approach Achintee and reach the T junction.

Photos: An Teallach in a wild setting, a map of Wester Ross and the turning from the A87 west of Dornie to Strathcarron.

Carron Restaurant with the Carron Pottery & Gallery alongside

T junction just north of Strathcarron station and Achintee

Road is alongside the Inverness to Kyle of Lochalsh railway line

Ledgowan Hotel

Strathcarron station near Achintee village

Looking towards the roundabout at Achnasheen - the Ledgowan Lodge Hotel is a comfortable overnight stop.

Inverewe Gardens outside the village of Poolewe.

Loch Ewe with NATO refuelling facilities with Aultbea beyond.

Aultbea on Loch Ewe

At the T junction just north of Achintee, Glen Carron is off to the right which eventually opens out into a wide strath with an excellent road with wonderful views – ideal for a classic MG.

As you approach the roundabout at **Achnasheen** the **Ledgowan Lodge Hotel** is a welcome sight. Turning hard left at the roundabout for Gairloch, the route continues with a spectacular vista down Glen Docherty to Kinlochewe and then on to Loch Maree.

Loch Maree

Some of the most stunning views are on the 13 mile route alongside the fourth largest fresh water loch in Scotland and surely one of the most beautiful. The loch contains five large wooded islands and over 25 smaller ones. The Isle Maree has the remains of a chapel, graveyard, holy well, and holy tree on it, believed to be the 8th century hermitage of Saint MÇel Ruba who founded the monastery of Applecross in 672. The same island also contains ancient stands of oak and holly which have been linked with ancient Scottish druids.

The A832, starting in **Kinlochewe**, is the only road in the area and stretches along the south side of the loch. On the north-side of the loch the impressive Slioch mountain casts her reflection over the deep waters, a very steep mountain which rises 980 meters above Loch Maree.

Gairloch and Loch Ewe

Gairloch, with its busy harbour area, is a loosely defined area of settlement with hotels and a filling station along the shores of Loch Gairloch. Climbing steeply from the big sandy beaches there you drop down to the attractive village of **Poolewe** at the head of **Loch Ewe**. In the 17th Century it was an area around an iron furnace utilising charcoal produced from felling very large tracts of timber in the surrounding woodlands, but the operation didn't last long because the timber supplies rapidly became depleted! Just outside the village is **Inverewe House with its gardens** developed from 1862 by Osgood Mackenzie and now in the care of the National Trust for Scotland.

As you approach **Aultbea**, the expanse of the sea loch, with its narrow entrance and sheltered location and relics of anti-aircraft defences, give a clue to the wartime history of Loch Ewe as a naval port of significant strategic importance to the UK. During WW2 many submarines set off for the Atlantic Ocean from here, as did many ship convoys headed for West Africa, North

Little Loch Broom - looking across to Scoraig with its isolated community and beyond, Loch Broom to the north

An Teallach beyond the head of Little Loch Broom

The sun sets down Little Loch Broom – now for a pint at the Dundonnell Hotel nearby.

America and those on an "Arctic Run" to Murmansk in Russia. It is still a NATO depot with refuelling facilities.

Gruinard Island & Little Loch Broom

Soon after passing the village of **Laide** you see Gruinard Island which lies in the centre of a large bay on your left. The island was used for experiments using Anthrax spores prior to WW2 and remained out of bounds for many years until near the end of the 1990s.

Gruinard Bay has a fantastic beach – large and gently sloping where the sea recedes well out into the bay at low tide. This is a particularly relaxing spot for a beach walk.

After Gruinard Bay, the road climbs inland again to a high point with a parking area with wonderful views out over Little Loch Broom to the Scoraig peninsula and further north you can see Achiltibuie near the Summer Isles (see alongside). It's a perfect place for a break. The road then falls down to the side of the loch past the Ardessie falls to **Dundonnell** with its welcoming hotel.

Passing feral goats on the roadside, the route then winds its way up a gorge, often with a raging river alongside, to the **Destitution Road** built during a period of hunger and hardship in the area in the mid-1800s. From that road the impressive sight of **An Teallach** (see the previous page) and the Fannich mountains gives the area a wild feel. The road then drops down once more to **Braemore Junction** where the road joins the A835 from Inverness to Ullapool.

Corrieshalloch Gorge

Just before you reach Braemore Junction, look out for a layby with a long view down to Ullapool on Loch Broom (see page 5) and then a car park on your left for the Corrieshalloch Gorge. It is well worth a stop to take a walk down into the 200ft deep gorge with a viewing point on a small bridge spanning the spectacular waterfalls.

Long view down to Ullapool from near Braemore Junction

Ferry heading off for the islands.

Ullapool
A diversion down a steep hill from Braemore Junction passes the Lael Forrest to Ullapool, a busy fishing town with plenty of shops, an excellent museum in a former Telford church (with a relatively rare balcony), hotels, accommodation and most important – a petrol station. Do keep your fuel tank topped up in the Highlands.

There is also a Highland Stoneware factory and shop with a selection of attractive handmade stoneware items. The "Tea by the Sea" cafe on the seafront is well worth a visit to enjoy their cakes and custard tarts.

Assynt
If you have time the area to the north of Ullapool, **Assynt**, is an extraordinary landscape with mountains like Suilven, which looks like a long admiral's hat. The geology is particularly interesting too – there are limestone areas with caves, unusual in the Highlands.

But returning to Braemore Junction the next sight on the A835 is the remote Aultguish Inn below the Glasgarnoch dam. Then you drive on to Garve and across the bridge to Inverness for the route south on the A9.

Tea by the Sea on Shore Street facing the harbor at Ullapool - well worth a visit for their delicious cakes and custard tarts.