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TGO Challenge – EVENT DETAILS 2024

Welcome to the 44th Great Outdoors Challenge.

Please read this document regardless of how many times you have participated. Whilst some of it is aimed at first time Challengers, many sections are relevant to experienced Challengers. If you haven't already done so, please read the [TGOC24 – Terms and Conditions](#) before submitting your application, as you will need to agree to these terms as part of the entry process, and please refer to the separate document '[Filling in your Route Sheet](#)' before completing your Route Sheet.

The coordinators can help with queries but, before you contact them, please check the information you seek is not within these pages. Clicking on any [blue text](#) will take you to additional information. Useful contact information and phone numbers can be found in the [Resources](#) section of the website.

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Please open the Event Details and the Route Sheet PDF in Adobe Acrobat Reader.



It will make them easier to use and print.

Click [here](#) to download Acrobat Reader for free.



Wild camp by loch – Tony McAndrew

AN OUTLINE OF THE CHALLENGE

The Great Outdoors Challenge is a demanding, self-supported walk, west to east, across Scotland. It is not a competition, a race nor a running event. It aims to encourage fellowship amongst walkers fostering a relaxed atmosphere in which participants can enjoy Scotland's wild and remote places as well as the company of other Challengers. We ask everyone, however hard they drive themselves, to respect the non-competitive principle.

There are no pre-set or advised trails – planning your own route is what makes the Challenge unique. Some devise routes that include summits and ridges whilst others walk mainly through the glens (valleys). No special merit is attached to a higher-level crossing – all successful Challengers receive the same certificate.

There are few rules. The most important is that every step is walked, except for some ferry crossings, within the Challenge boundaries between the start and finish dates. This means if you need to take transport at any point you must return to the same point for your crossing to be valid. The [Access](#) and [Bothy](#) codes must be followed and due respect given to the landscape, those who live and work there, and to fellow Challengers. A few more [Dos and Don'ts](#) to help you gauge the spirit of the Event can be found on the website.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Any multi-day Scottish backpacking trip is a serious undertaking, and the Challenge should be approached as such.

- ❑ **Terrain** – If your main experience of mountainous areas is in England, Wales or overseas, you may find the terrain much tougher than you expect. Be prepared for rough, often wet, pathless ground. In many areas travelling at 2-3km an hour is good going with a full pack. Vetter Colin Crawford's [Notes on Scottish Terrain](#) and [Sabine Zawadski's, Dean Read's and Wandering Drew's](#) vlogs show the kind of terrain you are likely to encounter.



Bog-hopping – Tim Robinson

- ❑ **Navigation** – You need to be capable of navigating accurately using map and compass. Unlike Continental Europe or North America, you will find few paths waymarked, and some marked on the map are not evident on the ground. Conversely there are paths and estate tracks that aren't on the map . . .
- ❑ **Climate** – Scotland's climate is notoriously unpredictable. High winds and heavy rain are common. You are likely to face unbridged burns (streams) which can be impossible to cross safely in spate (high water) necessitating long diversions. There is often significant snow cover on the mountains, requiring winter equipment if you plan a higher route, and occasionally fresh fall at lower levels. It can also be hot and sunny!
- ❑ **Shelter** – The Challenge is designed to be a backpacking event so you should carry a tent or other suitable shelter. Whilst you might visit a town or village every few days where you can find accommodation, you should expect to be wild camping much of the time.

INTERACTIVE MAP

An interactive map, showing much of the information in these pages and can be viewed [here](#). Please note it is not hosted on the TGO Challenge website.

COMMUNICATION

We will use the email address given on your entry form so please let us know if this changes and mark tgochallenge@gmail.com as a "safe sender", or add to your contacts, to ensure you receive everything. Please note @btinternet and @talktalk addresses sometimes block our mail without showing it in a junk folder. If you have an alternative email address, please use it.

All emails are acknowledged, usually within 3 days, so if you haven't had a response, please contact us again.

- ❑ **Coordinators** – Sue, Ali & Mick are your contacts at tgochallenge@gmail.com or by phone on 07786 628105, 07714 329917 or 07769 952085.
- ❑ **Vetters** may give their contact details with their comments. Please copy the coordinators into any communications regarding your route.

PLANNING FOR THE CHALLENGE

The Challenge needs a lot of preparation, which can be a little daunting if this is your first crossing. In common with other events, you need to prepare yourself and your equipment, but the unique aspect of the Challenge is designing your own bespoke route. This can be time-consuming, at times frustrating, but ultimately immensely satisfying. Like a good wine your route needs time to mature so don't leave it until the last minute – start early and let it evolve. You might find [Rich Jones' "preparation ponderings"](#) blog post helpful.

SKILLS

You, and any teammates, need:

- ☐ Previous experience of backpacking including 'leave no trace' wild camping in an environment with no facilities. One of these trips needs to be in the last few years and at least 3 days long.
- ☐ The ability to navigate across pathless, rugged terrain using map and compass – whether digital or manual. You must not be solely reliant on GPS.
- ☐ The capacity to carry personal/camping equipment with a minimum of 3 days' provisions.
- ☐ Experience of being self-sufficient, including first aid skills, in remote areas where help may not be easily accessible.
- ☐ The ability to assess and deal with risks and adverse weather (wind, rain and occasionally snow and sun!) including unbridged rivers/burns in spate and other obstacles that present themselves along the way.

If you lack any of these please speak to the coordinators. It is best to be honest with yourself (and us) at this stage. We will do all we can to help you prepare a route that is within your capabilities but, if necessary, your entry can be deferred until 2025 to give you time to gain these essential skills.

EQUIPMENT

As the TGO Challenge is an event for experienced backpackers, we do not provide a comprehensive equipment list. However, for your safety, we would highlight that the following items should be carried:

- ☐ Tent or suitable shelter and sleeping bag
- ☐ Cooking equipment
- ☐ Waterproof and windproof clothing
- ☐ Emergency rations for at least one full day
- ☐ Maps, compass and whistle for each member of the team
- ☐ Suitable first aid kit
- ☐ If snow conditions prevail, an ice axe (and the skills and experience to use it) is essential for higher-level routes.

MAPS

Whether you use physical or digital maps you should use the most up-to-date editions. Whatever you chose as your primary means of navigation you need to carry a backup. If using digital maps, you should also carry either printouts or a second separate device, as phones can fail or run out of power. If using physical maps, you should carry spare copies or a digital device in case your maps get lost or damaged.

Sheet maps or printouts and digital downloads should cover sufficient territory to allow for diversions necessitated by extreme weather or injury.

There are many parts of the Challenge area where there is no mobile internet signal. If using a digital mapping app during the Event please ensure you have downloaded all the relevant maps for use offline.

Timeline

Below you will find a list of important dates and deadlines:

- ☐ **1st November** – routes can be submitted for vetting. Please don't send them before!
- ☐ **14th December** – last chance to withdraw without losing all of your entry fee.
- ☐ **17th January** – route submission deadline for Challengers who have completed 5 or more Challenges (or groups containing such a Challenger).
- ☐ **10th February** – route submission deadline for Challengers who have completed 1–4 Challenges (or groups containing such a Challenger).
- ☐ **25th February** – route submission deadline for first time solo Challengers and groups comprising only first time Challengers.
- ☐ **Early April** – Final Details (including details of start/finish arrangements) and medical/emergency contact forms circulated, to be completed and returned within two weeks.
- ☐ **9th May** – participants starting on this date have until 5pm, Thursday 23rd May to sign out in Montrose after completing their crossing on the east coast.
- ☐ **10th May** – participants starting on this date have until 5pm, Friday 24th May to sign out in Montrose after completing their crossing on the east coast.
- ☐ **11th to 16th May** – later starters are welcome but must still finish by 5pm Friday 24th May.
- ☐ **21st to 24th May** – celebration dinners, held at the Park Hotel.
- ☐ **24th May** – TGOC24 finishes promptly at 5pm.

The deadlines will be strictly observed and only extended in truly exceptional circumstances.

- ☐ **OS 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey Landranger** maps are recommended to both plan and walk your route. Your vetter will use these maps.
- ☐ **OS 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey Explorer** maps can be useful for planning as they give more detail (e.g. field boundaries)
- ☐ **Harveys 1:40,000 and 1:25,000 maps** are excellent maps designed specifically for walkers but do not cover the entire Challenge area.
- ☐ **Large scale maps** such as road maps and Google Earth can be used when planning to get an overview but must not be relied upon during the Challenge.

We consider only OS and Harveys maps to be suitable for walking the TGO Challenge. Please ensure any device you rely upon for navigation supports these.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS CHALLENGE PERIMETER, START POINTS AND SCOTTISH TRANSPORT LINKS

The adjacent map highlights the area within the Challenge perimeter (further described below), and shows the start points and key transport links that will help get to your start point and to/from Montrose at the end. Additional information can be found in the interactive [Challengers' Map](#).

CHALLENGE PERIMETER

- ☐ **West** – Western seaboard of mainland Scotland from Torridon south to Ardnamurchan Point, across to eastern Mull (Dervaig to Strathcoil), then by Oban (including Kerrera and Lismore), down coast to Crinan, the Crinan Canal to Ardrishaig, across Loch Fyne to Otter Ferry, south to Portavadie.
- ☐ **South** – Mainland coast around Kyles of Bute, Firth of Clyde and Loch Long to Arrochar, Tarbet, south along Loch Lomond to Rowardennan (to include Ben Lomond), east following Duchray Water to Aberfoyle, Rob Roy Way to Callander, A84/A920/A9 to Doune, Dunblane and Perth, north side of Tay Estuary to Arbroath.
- ☐ **East** – The eastern seaboard from Arbroath to Fraserburgh.
- ☐ **North** – North coast from Fraserburgh to Inverness, north shore of the Beaully Firth (but not Moray Firth) to Muir of Ord, A832/A896 to Achnasheen, Kinlochewe and Torridon.

START POINTS – [CLICK HERE FOR FULL DETAILS](#)

- 1 Torridon Youth Hostel
- 2 Strathcarron Hotel
- 3 Plockton Hotel
- 4 Dornie Hotel
- 5 Kintail Lodge Hotel, Shiel Bridge
- 6 Mrs Davidson, Taobh na Mara, Glenelg
- 7 West Highland Hotel, Mallaig
- 8 Morar Hotel
- 9 Lochailort Inn Currently closed
- 10 Loch Shiel Hotel, Acharacle
- 11 Kilchoan Hotel
- 12 Oban Youth Hostel
- 13 The Grey Gull Inn, Ardrishaig
- 14 Portavadie Marina

[Click here](#) for further information about rail, bus and air links.



Important Note for all Participants

All those participating in The Great Outdoors Challenge do so at their own risk, in accordance with the spirit of the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#), which states:

“There is a longstanding legal principle called ‘volenti non fit injuria’ which means that a person taking access will generally be held to have accepted any obvious risks which are inherent in the activities they are undertaking.”

We might offer advice on routes, but ultimately participants must rely solely on their own skills and judgment and carry out their own evaluations of risks encountered. Participants are responsible for ensuring they are sufficiently fit and have suitable skills and equipment for an arduous two-week backpack. Any Challenger who has ongoing medical problems should obtain medical advice before taking part, ensuring the medical professional is aware of the nature of the Event. Participants are deemed to accept the inherent risk of mountain walking and agree to participate in The Great Outdoors Challenge at their own risk. Participants are strongly advised to consider personal accident insurance.

By participating, Challengers agree to abide by the rules, conditions and spirit of the Challenge, as summarised here and in the [TGOC24 - Terms and Conditions](#). They must accept that Scotia Challenge Ltd Event, the coordinators and vetters shall not be liable for any damage, loss, injury or death which may arise from participating in The Great Outdoors Challenge, other than that caused as a result of our negligence.

OUTDOOR MAP NAVIGATOR

We are delighted that **Outdoor Map Navigator**, established as Anquet Maps in 2001, continues as the TGO Challenge's digital mapping partner, offering all Challengers (including current subscribers) a 7-month free subscription to their OS Premium Service, which includes:



- ☐ Streamed access to the latest 1:50k and 1:25k OS HD maps on PCs and Macs.
- ☐ Downloading of maps for offline use on Android/iOS smartphones and tablets.
- ☐ Facility to plan and edit routes, and share files with teammates, coordinators and vetters.
- ☐ Facility to print maps.
- ☐ Upgrade from 7 months of OS Premium to a year of OS Premium Plus for just £15.

Read more about Outdoor Map Navigator at www.anquet.com

The free subscriptions will be issued to Challengers in late October. Existing subscribers' renewal dates will be extended by 7 months.

Outdoor Map Navigator also supports the TGO Challenge by providing route vetters with a long-term service. We are extremely pleased to be able to offer our loyal and long-suffering team something other than profuse thanks!

STARTING YOUR CROSSING

Picking your start is as good a place as any to begin. Each start point gives a very different experience and more detailed information on each can be found [here](#).

The start registers are mostly held by small family-run hotels or hostels, usually in their reception areas. Please consider using them for food or accommodation before you start as they have supported the TGO Challenge for many years.

Regular Challengers are encouraged to use different start points on each crossing and to explore lesser used starts such as Acharacle, Ardrishaig, Glenelg, Morar, Portavadie and Plockton.

WHAT TYPE OF ROUTE?

- ☐ **Higher or lower level?** On your first crossing, unless you have significant backpacking experience in Scotland's hills, we recommend a lower-level route. If you have suitable experience and want to take in some hills you will be asked to provide a Foul Weather Alternative for each high day. FWAs can be used as an easier alternative on the day even in good weather!
- ☐ **Solitary or sociable?** You can plan a route where you hardly meet a soul or a more sociable one visiting some of the towns and villages that have taken the

Challenge to their heart. Many people mix and match periods of solitude with a taste of the famous Challenge camaraderie.

- ☐ **Themes and highlights.** It is worth looking for places you might want to visit before you start detailed planning, marking them on a large-scale map to see which are feasible to connect. Some Challengers have picked themes in the past e.g. linking drove roads, castles or even searching out tea rooms!
- ☐ **Duration of crossing.** Remember it is not a race! Unless you are constrained by work or family commitments, why hurry? Make the most of Scotland's magnificent wild places and savour them.
- ☐ **Distance and ascent.** From our experience 18–25km (12–15 miles) per day is enough for most people. You need to allow for the nature of the ground and ascent for each day – some 15km days can be extremely arduous.

WHERE TO FINISH?

You can finish anywhere on the East Coast between Fraserburgh and Arbroath. If you need some ideas, see Roger Smith's [Guide to Finish Points](#). After reaching the east coast **all participants must report in person to Challenge Control at the Park Hotel, Montrose to sign out** but you may use motorised public or private transport to get there.

THE PARK HOTEL

The [Park Hotel](#) usually offers special bed and breakfast rates to TGO Challengers, and a limited number of camping pitches in the garden, with access to a shower. Details can be found on the [special offers](#) page of the website.

PHONE IN POINTS

You will be asked for a minimum of four phone in points during your crossing from where you will check in with Challenge Control via phone, text or WhatsApp. This is the core of our safety procedure. Failure to check in on the designated day may result in concern at Control and possibly a referral to Mountain Rescue. It is important they are:

- ☐ Places with reliable mobile reception, access to a landline or to wi-fi, ideally in towns or villages.
- ☐ Not on summits or ridges – you might not be there if taking your FWA.
- ☐ Not your start or finish point.
- ☐ No more than 4 days apart.

Please note that coverage maps provided by phone companies are often over optimistic. Any place listed in Challenge Control's [phone in list](#) will be accepted, and others will be considered if they meet the criteria stated above.

FOUL WEATHER ALTERNATIVE (FWA)

You must provide a foul weather alternative when your route crosses high ground that is pathless or exposed. The need for a FWA is not solely defined by altitude. The nature of the terrain, duration of walking at an exposed height and whether a clear path is evident, all have a bearing, as does the experience of the Challenger(s). However, routes over 900m always need one whilst routes under 500m usually do not, unless there are un-bridged burns and rivers that may be impossible to cross safely in spate. A FWA may need to be more than one day long – for example Jock's Road and the Lairig Ghru both need multi-day FWAs.

FWAs need serious thought and are often the hardest aspect of route planning. Inadequate or missing FWAs are the main reason for routes requiring revision. There are some routes where FWAs are mandatory (see list below) but in other situations the need may be more nuanced. Please do not be upset if you are asked for additional FWAs. It is better to have a plan B for when conditions are dire, and it is easier for Challenge Control to anticipate where you might be if there are concerns about you.

FWAs are always required for the following routes:

- ☐ Fording the River Feshie and other substantial unbridged rivers
- ☐ Lairig Ghru
- ☐ Summit of Mount Keen (bypass path acceptable)
- ☐ Jock's Road
- ☐ Fords of Avon
- ☐ Kilbo path
- ☐ Carn an t-Sagairt Mor path/Dubh Loch route
- ☐ Any Munro (hills over 3000ft/913m) or Corbett (hills over 2500ft/762m) summit.

While slightly lower routes, such as the Corrieyairack Pass, are acceptable, extreme weather can render them impassable. Common sense has to be applied during the Event and on occasions you may have to wait for weather or water levels to subside.

The weather doesn't have to be bad to use your FWA – it can also be a Feeling Weary Alternative! You may also have to use it in good conditions if there is snow and ice on the tops and you do not have winter equipment. If you deviate significantly from your main route or FWA you should let Challenge Control know your new plans as soon as you have a phone signal.

RIVER CROSSINGS

The persistent rain at the start of TGOC22 brought into sharp focus how an unbridged river can change from a gentle burbling burn into an uncrossable raging torrent.



Vetters may warn of burns known to be difficult in spate in their comments, but they cannot know of all hazardous crossings, and, in the worst of conditions, even minor side streams can become major obstacles.

Fording unbridged rivers is probably one of the biggest hazards on the Challenge and you must know how to do it safely. River crossing advice is available from Mountaineering Scotland [here](#). As a rule, if the water is above your knees, you probably shouldn't be in it. Although frustrating, diverting in search of a safer crossing or putting your tent up and waiting (rivers can go down as quickly as they come up) are safer options.

ROAD WALKING

We advise you keep this to a minimum as it is tough on the feet and joints. Some minor roads, such as those running through Glen Lonan and by Loch Arkaig, are hard to avoid but in many places there are alternatives if you look for them. Please avoid long stretches on major roads which often have blind bends and fast traffic that is not expecting pedestrians on sometimes narrow verges. If your route contains excessive road walking or takes you on particularly dangerous roads, you may be asked to revise it.

FERRY CROSSINGS

You may make an initial boat journey to reach another point on the coast, or cross, but not travel along, large bodies of water such as Loch Ness and Loch Linnhe. Possible crossings are listed below. These may need to be prebooked:

1 Mallaig to Inverie

Western Isle Cruises (01687 462 233) offer regular sailings. They will use their larger boat on busier crossings if it is available.

2 Dalelia to Polloch

Crossings of Loch Shiel can be arranged with Izzy Buchan and John Macaulay – dalilea@outlook.com or 01967 431253.

3 Camusnagaul to Fort William

Highland Ferries – now operates 7 days a week. For information or bookings, call 07468 417137.

4 Corran Ferry

Sailings every 20–30 mins across Loch Linnhe from 6:30 am (8:30 Sun) to 9:20pm – no need to book.

5 Lismore ferries

Calmac (0800 066 5000) from Oban to Lismore and **Argyll and Bute Council** (01546 605522) from the north end of Lismore to Appin.

6 Tarbert (Loch Fyne) to Portavadie

Calmac (0800 066 5000). Runs hourly from 8am to 6pm. This can be used to access the start point at Portavadie.

7 Tarbet (Loch Lomond) Inversnaid and Rowardennan

Cruise Loch Lomond (01301 702356) offers waterbus services across Loch Lomond. Tarbet to Rowardennan runs on weekends only; Tarbet to Inversnaid operates daily.

8 Drumnadrochit to Inverfarigaig

Gordon Menzies's special service for Challengers runs from Temple Pier (NH 528 300) on the north side of Urquhart Bay to Inverfarigaig (NH 518 237) with the morning crossing usually departing between 8-9am and the afternoon crossing between 4-5pm. If planning to use the ferry please note on your route sheet in the box provided; there is no need to book direct with Gordon.

Other crossings (commercial ferries or private hire) are possible but please check the route is acceptable with the coordinators before making firm bookings.

RESOURCES

You can get inspiration from lots of sources but here are a few suggestions. There are more in the [resources](#) section of the website.

BOOKS

- ❑ **Scottish Hill Tracks** (Scotways) describes Scotland's rights of way and is a good place to start when planning your route.
- ❑ **Scotland by Chris Townsend** (Cicerone) gives a comprehensive guide to all the mountain ranges in the Challenge area. Chris is the gear editor for TGO and a regular Challenger himself.
- ❑ **Hostile Habitats – Scotland's Mountain Environments by Mark Wrightham and Nick Kempe** (SMC) is a guide for walkers to Scotland's wildlife and landscapes.

CHALLENGERS' BLOGS

You can find accounts of crossings [here](#). By all means visit some places you have read about but please don't copy a route in its entirety. The Challenge is all about producing your own personal bespoke route.

WEBSITES

- ❑ **Where's the path** – OS maps and aerial photography side by side – a very useful planning tool, and still usable, although the website is no longer supported and the search function is broken.
- ❑ **Bing Maps** – provides the ability to toggle between OS maps and aerial photography.
- ❑ **Geograph** – access to photos for individual grid squares – a good way to get an idea of the terrain and scenery you may encounter.
- ❑ **Walkhighlands** – mainly day routes but useful if you are incorporating some hills.
- ❑ **Core paths** – particularly useful when trying to avoid stretches of road walking in lowland areas as it shows many newly adopted paths which may not yet appear on OS maps. Core Path networks can be accessed through local government websites.
- ❑ **TGO Challenge website** – there is plenty of helpful information on the website.

If you are still struggling for ideas or how to connect places talk to the coordinators who can give you some suggestions. The fine detail, though, will still be up to you.

ACCESS

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act gives a general right of responsible access to open countryside in Scotland. There are exceptions such as the vicinity of buildings, industrial sites, airports, railway lines and military areas. The Act includes a right to wild camp responsibly, away from buildings, for one or two nights. The rights and responsibilities are explained in the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#).

Access may be temporarily restricted for reasons including forestry operations and the construction of hydroelectric schemes or windfarms. Any reasonable notices should be followed for your own safety. The coordinators will post information on the [Access News](#) page on the website on any known projects.

There is a longstanding, generally good, relationship between landowners and hillgoers in Scotland. We ask you to help us preserve and foster this by showing due consideration to the land and its people. Those who live and work on the land should be treated with respect regardless of your views about the job they may do. In general, if camping on farmland or near houses please ask for permission.

Please be scrupulous about disposing of litter and **human waste** properly, leaving 'no trace' at wild campsites and keeping bothies clean and tidy. This is becoming a major problem in Scotland – let's not add to it.

Within the context of 'freedom to roam' there are a number of places where we would ask you to observe local requests:

- ❑ **Glen Feshie** camping to be confined to the area around, or to the south of, Ruigh-aiteachain Bothy (NN 847 928).
- ❑ **Balmoral Estate** no camping around Loch Muick and Spittal of Glenmuick. You may camp in the vicinity of the bothies at Gelder Shiel (NO 256 905), Glas-Allt-Shiel (north side of Loch Muick, NO 275 825) and Shielin of Mark (NO 335 826).
- ❑ **Glen Lee** no camping on or near the shores of Loch Lee.
- ❑ **Glen Mazeran** please do not walk past Glenmazeran Lodge; instead take the right fork at NH 744 227, cross the river and drop to the minor road at NH 748 224.

PATHS, TRACKS, BRIDGES AND FENCES

Paths are marked on the map with single dashes (– – –). Unlike continental Europe or North American trails, they are not normally waymarked and may be indistinct or even absent on the ground. Most are not maintained and may be rough and wet.

Tracks are marked with double dashes (===) and are usually suitable for all terrain vehicles. They are generally evident on the ground and vary from well-constructed dirt roads to rough cart tracks.

Bridges may be lost in winter storms, and we may not be aware of damage, particularly in remote areas, before the Event. If a bridge is absent or unsafe you must be prepared to use your initiative to find a safe crossing point or divert your route. Known information regarding damaged bridges on popular routes will be posted [here](#). Fences can be unexpected obstacles. Deer fences are commonly over 2m high and may require a diversion if you can't find a gate or climb over. Some locations, mainly in the eastern highlands, have electric fences; there should be regular crossing points, but these may take some time to locate.

TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION

Travel. The [travel](#) and [start point](#) pages of the website should point you in the right direction.

Wild camping. This is what the Challenge is about! We strongly advise that you carry a tent and those not planning to camp should also carry a shelter in case of emergencies. When choosing your equipment bear in mind sub-zero temperatures are common in May and your shelter needs to be capable of withstanding gale-force winds and heavy rain. The reputation of wild campers has been sullied in recent years by litter, fire rings and human waste being left at popular spots – it is imperative that the TGO Challenge does not add to this. Please choose where you camp carefully, making sure you are well away from roads and occupied buildings, and practise leave no trace camping. Please do not light fires other than in a bothy grate or stove.

Bothies are basic shelters open to all. They are a valuable resource offering welcome refuge in adverse weather, many of which are maintained by the [Mountain Bothies Association](#) so please consider supporting the organisation. There are also many non-MBA estate bothies that are open to walkers.

Campsites marked on maps may no longer exist or accommodate tents and those that do may require pre-booking. Some (e.g. Aboyne Loch Caravan Park) may make special arrangements for Challengers and others may drop their minimum 2 day stay so it is worth a polite enquiry even if the website is discouraging. Bear in mind many may not be open until the Spring for enquiries. There is usually high demand for pitches at Braemar, Ballater, North Water Bridge and Montrose.

There were reports of unacceptable behaviour by TGO Challengers at Braemar Caravan Park in 2023, including excessive noise, a room being left in an unacceptable state and a freezer being unplugged to facilitate phone charging.

For the future of the Challenge, it is important that the behaviour of a few doesn't bring the name of the TGO Challenge into disrepute and threaten the availability of hospitality for all Challengers. This applies at all locations, but is brought into sharper focus at pinch points where on the peak nights relatively small settlements may find their numbers swelled with over 100 Challengers.

We remind all Challengers to not only leave no trace at wild campsites, but also apply the same principles and minimise impact at commercial establishments.

Braemar Caravan Park Mike and Peter have kindly reserved all their small tent pitches for Challengers from 16th to 19th May so these are not available online. Pre-booking is advised by phone (01339 741 373) stating you are a TGO24 participant. Overseas participants may email info@braemarcaravanpark.co.uk if it is difficult to call. **Booking for May 2024 will not open until 15th December 2023.**

Ballater Caravan Park A discount is available to Challengers but to access this you must book by phone – 01339 755727 **after 3rd October.**

South Links Caravan Site in Montrose is run by Angus Council. Bookings can now be made [online](#).

Dovecot Caravan Park at North Water Bridge has advised that space will be found for all Challengers, with no booking required.

B&Bs and hotels Most villages and towns offer a choice of accommodation. Details of many can be found on websites and apps such as [Visit Scotland](#) (01387 245 550), [TripAdvisor](#), [Booking.com](#) and [AirBnB](#). Please note remote buildings named on the map as 'Lodge' do not usually provide accommodation.

Hostels

Hostelling Scotland (0345 293 7373) offers Challengers a discount on bookings between 8th and 24th May at hostels in the Challenge area. This does not include the affiliated hostels on their website. Quote code **TGO24** when booking.

Scottish Hostels is a network of independent hostels many of which are regularly used by Challengers. Most accommodation providers give a warm welcome to Challengers but there are a few which have gone the extra mile to help us in past years, some opening their doors especially for the Event.

- ❑ **Ault-na-Goire, Errogie, NH 544 229** – the Sutherlands offer a great welcome along with camping. Please email janet.sutherland@talk21.com (or ring 01456 486 711 if you cannot email) to tell Janet you are planning to stay. Food may also be available. They are happy to hold resupply parcels if informed in advance.
- ❑ **Callater Lodge, NO 178 844** – Bill Duncan will open Callater Lodge for Challengers once again and food may be available on some evenings.
- ❑ **Cougie Lodge, NH 242 212** – Melanie and her family (melaniejpstrang@hotmail.com or 07773 491 262) will be welcoming Challengers for food, accommodation and camping.

A Brief History of the Challenge

The idea came from writer and mountaineer Hamish Brown. He had crossed Scotland on foot himself and felt that similar crossings could be accomplished and enjoyed by others within the framework of an organised non-competitive event.

In autumn 1979 Hamish presented the idea to Roger Smith, then editor of The Great Outdoors magazine, and the first Event was held the following Spring. Since then it has become a hillwalking institution. That the Challenge has continued, format unchanged, since 1980, is a tribute to Hamish's original concept. It was sponsored by TGO magazine from the outset but was originally known as The Ultimate Challenge after the first co-sponsors, Ultimate Equipment Ltd. The only years in which a full Challenge was not held were 2001, when an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease led to severe access restrictions (a partial crossing from Strathspey to the east coast was arranged) and 2020 when the Event had to be cancelled due to Covid-19. In 2021 the Challenge was postponed to June due to ongoing Covid restrictions resulting in a smaller, socially distanced but successful Event.

Hamish was one of five people who completed all of the first 10 Challenges, the others being Bill Robertson, Bob Dawes, Ron Reynolds and Dave MacArthur. Bill completed his 33rd crossing in 2016. Graham Brookes became the second person to achieve 30 crossings in 2022. The oldest participant so far was Jim Taylor who completed his 20th crossing in 2014 at the age of 91, surpassing the record of fellow nonagenarian Jack Griffiths.

To date, 3,807 people have participated in the Event. A total of 11,320 crossings have been attempted and 9,993 have been completed which is a success rate of 88%. A remarkable achievement for a remarkable event.

Roger Smith acted as coordinator for two decades, steering it from strength to strength. After retiring in 2011 he maintained a close association acting as consultant and a member of the valued team of vetters until 2021. Roger was succeeded by former TGO deputy editor John Manning, who has ten crossings to his name. After three years John handed the reins to Sue Oxley and Ali Ogden who first met on the Challenge in 2004 and have both completed multiple crossings. They have been joint coordinators since 2014 and, as directors of Scotia Challenge Ltd, acquired the TGO Challenge in November 2020. Mick Blackburn joined them as a coordinator in 2023.

- ❑ **Dalwhinnie** – Lee at the **Old School Hostel** will hold resupply parcels and has supplies of gas and meths for sale. Please book beds with him directly, dalwhinniehostel@gmail.com, for a better price than on commercial booking platforms. Mike and Tracy at the **Apiary Cake and Coffee House** serve meals and will welcome Challengers again in 2024, with extended opening hours during the Challenge. The Grill and the Dalwhinnie Hotel's opening hours for next year are currently uncertain.
- ❑ **Mar Lodge, west of Braemar**, the National Trust for Scotland will offer hot drinks and biscuits in the Stables Courtyard. Payment by cash donation. They will also hold resupply parcels, though cannot take any responsibility for them.
- ❑ **Newtonmore Hostel** – we are not sure if we will still be running the hostel in May but will hold re-supply parcels at one of our homes if needed and a cup of tea and piece of cake might also be on offer.

TARFSIDE

St Drostan's Hostel in Tarfside (Glen Esk) has, for many years, been operated by TGO Challenge volunteers to provide refreshments and beds to Challengers. In recent years, the numbers had increased to such a degree that it had become a victim of its own success. The arrangements to alleviate this will be continued so as to balance a good degree of sociability without exhausting the volunteers or overwhelming the locals. In 2024 St Drostan's will be open from **the afternoon of Friday 17th to mid-morning on Thursday 23rd May**, on the following basis:

- ❑ NO MAIN MEALS OR ALCOHOL PROVIDED.
Everybody intending to stay at Tarfside must bring their own main meals.
- ❑ Light refreshments – teas, coffees, cakes, scones etc. during the day from 9am to 9pm.
- ❑ There is no mobile signal in Glen Esk and an unreliable phone box. All Challengers passing through Tarfside should check in with the volunteers at St Drostan's who will pass on your name and Challenge number to Control via the hostel phone.
- ❑ Re-supply parcels **cannot** be sent here.
- ❑ Hostel beds available on a first come, first served basis at £35 per bed.

Tarfside is special part of the Challenge, but it is important that numbers do not escalate again, or it risks becoming unsustainable. So please don't go there on every crossing. If you visited in 2023, we ask that you look for an alternative route to the coast this year.



A REASON TO CARRY A TRACKER!

In the heat of the afternoon on the second day of the 2023 Challenge Caburn Chamberlain decided to refresh himself in a stream.

I was just starting to strip off, taking my shoes off, when my replacement hip sub-luxed [came partly out of its socket]. "Well" I thought "I can sort this in a moment", as I'd done before, but then it went again – further – and entirely dislocated. That had me screaming in pain.

My pack was 5 feet away, but out of reach. I tried to get to it, but couldn't move, with any attempt being unbearable agony. In 20 minutes, I managed to move 6 inches, and the next bit of the 'ascent' to my pack was a grassy/mossy bank, which I just couldn't do.

My only hope was that I'd managed to get ahead of Arie and Yael, who had left Kinloch Hourn tea room just before me, as I'd not seen them on the track ahead of me, and I knew I'd taken a slightly shorter route to this point.

I was sooo lucky. I saw them approaching (I was only just off the path) and shouted them over.

There was no phone signal at all here, but they had a Garmin In-Reach tracker and were able to put out an SOS emergency call.

Arie and Yael were my Guardian Angels that day. NOBODY else came by that evening. They kept me warm, clothed, fed, watered and supplied with painkillers until the Coastguard helicopter arrived around 4 hours later. By then it was chilling off and starting to rain.

Without Arie and Yael's Garmin In-Reach, Caburn's plight would undoubtedly have lasted longer. It doesn't take much imagination to realise what the outcome might have been if they hadn't passed by at all.

The phone in system is integral to the TGO Challenge's safety procedure, but always bear in mind that if you should have an accident shortly after calling in, it may be several days before the alarm is raised.

We therefore strongly recommend that Challengers (particularly those going solo) carry a satellite tracker with an emergency call function, or a PLB, and it is kept within reach at all times.

The full story's of Caburn's incredible TGO Challenge 2023 can be found [here](#).

CHALLENGE COMPANIONS

Friends and family may join you for a few days or visit at planned stops but must not act as back-up crew. Unfortunately, to maintain good relationships with those working on the land, dogs are not allowed on the Challenge.

GPS TRACKERS

We strongly recommend the use of GPS trackers, especially for solo participants, as they give a means of summoning help in an emergency where there is no mobile signal and those with two-way communications can also reassure Control and relatives should you fall behind schedule but not need assistance. However, they are **not a substitute for the phone in system** which is an essential part of the TGO Challenge's safety system. Please note Challenge Control will not monitor GPS tracker maps routinely, only looking at them if a phone in has been missed or concerns have been raised about your welfare. Details of any devices carried and who will be monitoring them will be requested in April.

RESUPPLIES & TRAIL FOOD

The Challenge is a self-supported expedition so support or back-up crews very much contravene its spirit. However, you do not need to carry all you need for two weeks. Most Challengers resupply every 3–4 days. Supplies can be bought along the way or posted, with the owner's permission, to booked accommodation. Please note **some items** such as gas canisters cannot be carried on aircraft, sent in the post or by courier. Some shops and hospitality businesses have closed or limited their opening hours due to staff shortages so please check before relying upon them.

The following backpacking food suppliers are offering a discount in 2024:

Base Camp Foods – discount applies to food and energy products.

Discount code: **TGOC2024**

TentMeals – produce vegan meals.

Discount code: **TentMealsTGO24**.

Mountain Trails – Food on the Move have a specific webpage for Challengers [here](#).

Discount code: **TGOC24**.

MEDICAL INFORMATION AND EMERGENCY CONTACTS

In April each participant will be asked to provide a medical declaration including details of any long-term injuries and conditions. It remains your responsibility to ensure you are fit enough to participate. This information will only be passed on to the appropriate services in the event of an emergency.

You will also be asked to provide the number of the mobile phone you will carry, and to nominate emergency contact(s) who will be Challenge Control's first port of call if they are significantly worried about your welfare e.g. a missed phone in or known injury.

ANIMAL HAZARDS

Scotland doesn't have much wildlife that can harm you.

- ☐ **Adders** are our only venomous snake but are relatively shy. Bites are uncommon and rarely cause long term problems.
- ☐ **Ticks** are small blood-sucking arachnids common in the Highlands, particularly in long grass or heather. They tend to seek out dark moist areas of skin. **Tick removers** are an essential part of a Challenger's first aid kit. Ticks can transmit **Lyme Disease** which, although easily treated in the early stages, can cause longstanding problems if left untreated. **If you develop a rash or fever in the days or weeks after the Challenge you should consult a doctor as soon as possible.**
- ☐ **Cattle** may be encountered, mainly in lowland areas. Use an alternative route if one is available. If not, proceed slowly and quietly giving them as wide a berth as possible. Be particularly cautious of cows with calves and, of course, bulls.
- ☐ **Capercaillie** – a magnificent but highly territorial large bird that can react aggressively to people. The one in Glen Tanar can cause the need for a long diversion. Please follow any diversion signs.
- ☐ **Midges** are rarely a problem in May. If we have a warm spring, you may encounter some in sheltered spots especially near water.

FINISHING YOUR CROSSING

Once you have dipped your toes in the North Sea **you must come to Challenge Control at The Park Hotel, Montrose to sign out** and receive your certificate and T-shirt. You may use public or private transport to get there – no need to walk any further.

We will be offering three celebratory meals from Wednesday 22nd to Friday 24th May seating a maximum of 100 people, and you should indicate on your route sheet which (if any) you wish to attend. Tickets will be allocated in the final week of the Challenge, and given to you in person in Montrose. At all three celebratory meals, there will be some words about TGOC24, toasts, and plaques presented to those completing their 10th or 20th crossings. If there is sufficient demand, there will also be a smaller gathering on Tuesday 21st May. **At each dinner priority will be given to those who have completed their crossing that day and volunteers.** Those receiving plaques may bring one guest. Challengers planning to finish on a different day and other relatives and friends can only be accommodated if there are spare places.



Capercaillie, Glen Tanar – Sandy Millar

WITHDRAWALS AND CANCELLATION

Note that your last chance to withdraw without losing all of your entry fee is 14 December 2023. Further details about withdrawals and cancellations can be found in the **2024 – Terms and Conditions**. If you do withdraw from the Challenge, for any reason, please let us know as soon as possible.

COMPLETING YOUR ROUTE SHEET

Once your route has been planned you need to submit it to us on a 2024 Challenge **Route Sheet**. This is central to how the Challenge is organised, so it needs to be clear, concise and accurate. We cannot accept routes presented in any other form or on a route sheet from a previous year. Please read the separate document **Filling in your Route Sheet** before filling in your route sheet and, even if you are an experienced Challenger who has filled in many route sheets, **please use the Check List before submitting it for vetting.**

SUBMITTING YOUR ROUTE

Once your route sheet is complete, and you have ticked off all of the items on the checklist, please send it to the coordinators at tgochallenge@gmail.com.

We acknowledge all routes so if you have not heard from us within 3 days, please contact us by phone or text.

If there is any essential information missing or the route is difficult to follow, you may be asked to adjust your route before it is allocated to a vetter.

We try to allocate your route to a different vetter each year. The exception is for a route that is the same or similar to one previously vetted but not yet walked. It saves valuable vetting time if the previous vetter assesses any changes so please make this clear on submission.

GPX FILES

The TGOC23 experiment with GPX files was a success, with both vetters and Challenge Control finding them useful. We therefore invite all Challengers who use digital mapping to submit a GPX file along with their route sheet. The Route Sheet remains the primary means of route description, and will still need the same level of route description and ascent/distance figures as usual.

More detail is given in the **Filling in your Route Sheet** document, but the most significant changes for this year, based on feedback from 2023, are that a single GPX file can be submitted, with each day being identified separately within it, and the file can be emailed with your route sheet (rather than being uploaded to a cloud-based file sharing platform).

DEFERRED ROUTES

If your place has been deferred from the Covid years it is your choice whether you start from scratch or resubmit the previously planned route.

If using a previously vetted route, please transfer it on to a 2024 route sheet highlighting any changes in a different colour (if using the Word document) or describe the changes in your covering email. Your route sheet will be reviewed, and your previous comments updated.

VETTING PROCESS

However well you have researched your route there are always some nuggets of information that cannot be gleaned from a map or the internet. This is where the vetters come in. They are all experienced Challengers with a vast knowledge of Scotland's hills and glens. Some have been professional guides or involved in mountain rescue in the past, others have explored the Highlands for their own pleasure. All will offer advice that is well worth considering.

VETTERS' ROLE

Our vetters are volunteers who give their time for free. It takes a minimum of three hours to vet a straightforward route but can take several days for a complex one. They aim to assess your route for:

- ☐ **Feasibility** – including the suitability of FWAs and phone-in points.
- ☐ **Safety** – taking into account your previous experience.
- ☐ **Accuracy** – checking distances and ascents are accurate and reasonable and the route description can easily be followed by Challenge Control.
- ☐ **Advice** – they may make suggestions to enhance your crossing.
- ☐ **Revisions** – telling you if any revisions are advised or required.

Where possible they will comment on things that may not be evident on the map such as bridges that may be missing or in a poor state, new estate tracks and bothies. **However, your route is unique, so they cannot have knowledge of every step. Things may have changed on the ground of which the coordinators and vetting team are unaware. Whilst we try to keep up to date with information on popular routes the accuracy of information given cannot be guaranteed.** Getting across Scotland in one piece is your responsibility, not your vetter's. You need to use your initiative along the way. If you find things differ from the map or the advice given, please let us know for future reference.

VETTER COMMENTS

Your vetter will return comments to the coordinators who, after reading them, will send them on to you. Vettors work at different speeds so this may take up to two weeks. Please acknowledge receipt of your

comments. Every year a few go astray so if yours have not arrived within 3 weeks of submission please contact the coordinators.

REVISIONS

If your vetter requires you to make changes, or you choose to alter your route, your adjusted route sheet must be resubmitted to the coordinators. Please highlight (ideally in another colour) the changes you have made.

- ☐ **Required revisions.** Please resubmit your route within 4 weeks of receiving your vetter's comments.
- ☐ **Voluntary revisions.** If you choose to take some of your vetter's suggestions or need to adjust your route for any reason, please send us a revised route sheet as soon as possible.
- ☐ **Accommodation details.** Please let us know of any planned accommodation that was not on your original route sheet.

The coordinators may sign off minor changes, but for more complex revisions will pass your route back to the vetter for their assessment.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

There are a variety of ways in which you can keep in touch with other Challengers as well as Challenge news.

CHALLENGE WEBSITE

Go to www.tgochallenge.com where we will post updates on the [Challenge blog](#).

SOCIAL MEDIA #TGOC24

Follow the TGOChallenge Page on [Facebook](#) or tgo_challenge on [Instagram](#). You may also want to join our TGOChallenge Facebook Group, where questions can be asked of the Challenge Community and the search function can be used to find previous discussions.

MESSAGE BOARD

Challengers can share ideas and ask questions [here](#). There is a wealth of experience in the Challenge Community and someone is likely to have the answer to your question but please do not ask for a complete route! We ask that you use your real name, not a pseudonym, and respect other users.

REUNIONS

We have Reunions in Monyash, Derbyshire in March (organised by Alan & David Hardy) and Newtonmore, Scotland in October (organised by Kirsten Paterson) details of which can be found [here](#).

The [Hill and Mountain Walking Club](#) was formed in 1989 by Challengers and welcomes new members. They hold regular meets throughout the UK and abroad, offering the chance to meet up with Challenge friends as well as taking in a few hills.

TGO CHALLENGE SUPPORTERS

Ultralight Outdoor Gear

Ultralight Outdoor Gear was founded to provide backpackers with real choice when it comes to their gear and to present more information than is available elsewhere about each piece of kit. We use as much of the gear as we can and tell our online visitors honestly what we think, the stuff we don't have time to use gets examined at our offices and we give our verdict on it all, product by product.

You'll also find articles about backpacking routes around the world, the latest gear technology, how to choose products from the wide ranges available and other useful articles on subjects like food, winter backpacking, essential kit etc.

We are passionate about backpacking, especially in wild places.



Outdoor Map Navigator

Established as Anquet Maps in 2001, Outdoor Map Navigator has provided a digital mapping platform to outdoor enthusiasts for over twenty years.

The desktop and mobile apps provide access to the latest OS 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 maps. Routes can be created and edited on desktop or mobile devices, exported as GPX files, stored in Anquet's cloud and synced to other devices. Users can download maps for use without an internet connection. The mobile apps also show your current position, including a grid reference, and allow tracklogs to be recorded.



The Great Outdoors Magazine

The Great Outdoors is the UK's longest-established hiking magazine. We have been inspiring people to explore wild places for more than 40 years.

Through compelling writing, beautifully illustrated stories and eye-catching content, across a range of platforms, we seek to convey the joy of adventure, the thrill of mountainous and wild environments, and the wonder of the natural world. We're here to help you make the most of your time in the hills and mountains.

As well as stunning photography and top class writing, we are famous for the rigour of our gear reviews. Our reviewers are the country's most experienced team of testers – including world-renowned backpacking experts and long-distance walker, Chris Townsend – and we always ensure gear is put through its paces in challenging mountainous environments. Our essential skills advice is written by top outdoor instructors, guides and experts.

Our roster of contributors ranges from established outdoor writers and authors to younger, up and coming voices who reflect a new generation of outdoor enthusiasts.



For those who are unfamiliar with Scotland here are a few Gaelic/Scots words that might be useful.

abhainn = river
allt = stream
baile = farm, township
baine = pale
beag = small
beag-dhonas = imp or pixie
bealach = col
bearn = pass, gap
beinn = hill/mountain
bhuidhe = yellow
camus = beach, bay
clach = stone
cnoc = hillock
coille = wood
creag = crag

dearg = red
doire = wood
drochaid = bridge
druim = ridge
dubh = dark/black
eas = waterfall
eilean = island
fear/ban-sgrùdaidh = vetter
feith = stream
fiacail = toothed ridge
fraoch = heather
gairm-chatha = challenge
garbh = rough, stony
geal = white
gleann = valley

gorm = blue
grianan = sunny place
iolair = eagle
lairig = pass
liath = grey
linne = pool
lochan = small lake
madadh-allaidh = werewolf
meall = rounded hill
mhor/mor = large
moine = moss, bog
monadh = upland moor
morgha = shingle
odhar = dappled
pait = hump, knoll

rath = hill-fort
ruadh = russet
seanachas = legend
sgor/sgurr = pointed peak
slug = mire, morass
socach = snout-shaped hill
spate = high fast water
sron = shoulder
stob = peak
strath = wide valley
stuc = conical hill
uamh = cave
uaine = green
uisge = water
uisge-beatha = whisky