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TGO CHALLENGE – EVENT DETAILS 2026

Welcome to the 46th 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.

Regular Challengers will notice it is significantly different from previous years with information buttons to take you to more detailed information, especially where this may need updating throughout the year.

If you haven't already done so, please read the [2026 – Terms and Conditions](#) and the [Filling in your Route Sheet](#) webpage before completing your Route Sheet.

The Co-ordinators can help with queries but, before you contact them, please check the information you seek is not within these pages or on the TGO Challenge website.

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Button

Please open the Event Details in Adobe Acrobat Reader. It will make it easier to use and print.

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



Tim Day



AN OVERVIEW 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 or 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 T-shirt and certificate.

There are relatively few rules. The most important are:

- ❑ Walk every step, 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.
- ❑ Familiarize yourself with and observe the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) and the [Bothy Code](#).
- ❑ Treat the landscape, those who live and work there, fellow Challengers and other visitors with respect and kindness.
- ❑ Dogs are not allowed on the Challenge. Human friends, who do not have their own place, may join you for a few days but not your entire crossing.

A few more [Dos and Don'ts](#) to help you gauge the spirit of the Event can be found on the TGO Challenge website.

WHAT TO EXPECT

As with any multi-day backpacking trip, the TGO Challenge is a serious undertaking with Scotland's climate and terrain throwing in some extra challenges.

- ❑ **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 Scotland's Terrain](#) along with [Elli Schneider](#), [Sabine Zawadski](#), and [Dean Read's](#) YouTube videos show the kind of terrain you are likely to encounter.
- ❑ **Navigation** – You need to be capable of navigating accurately over pathless ground using a map and compass – whether physical or digital. Few paths are waymarked, some marked on the map are not evident on the ground, and some newer tracks on the ground may not be 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!



Ali Ogden

**Scottish Outdoor
Access Code**

Bothy Code

Dos and Don'ts



Heather Thomas-Smith

**Notes on Scottish
Terrain**

Navigation



Emma Warbrick

- ❑ **Shelter** – The Challenge is designed to be a backpacking event so you will need to 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.

HOW IT WORKS

The TGO Challenge doesn't start in May – it starts now! There are quite a lot of stages to go through before you set off from the west coast. For first time Challengers, here is a summary of what happens between sending in your entry form and collecting your certificate in Montrose.

- ❑ **Experience form** – If this is your first Challenge the Coordinators will need to assess your experience. They will contact you with their decision and may also advise those with limited experience in terrain similar to Scotland to take a lower-level route.
- ❑ **Route preparation** – You have 3-4 months in which to prepare your route. You will find it takes much longer than you think so we advise getting started on it as soon as possible. You should be looking at maps well before the radio starts playing Christmas tunes! There is lots of guidance available so don't worry, you won't be on your own. If you have problems, the Coordinators and the Challenge Community will be there to help you. The deadlines for route submission are:
 - ❑ **16th January** – for Challengers who have completed 5 or more Challenges (or groups containing such a Challenger).
 - ❑ **9th February** – for Challengers who have completed 1-4 Challenges (or groups containing such a Challenger).
 - ❑ **24th February** – for first time solo Challengers and groups comprising only first time Challengers.
- ❑ **Vetting process** – Once your route is ready you need to enter it on the online route sheet and submit it to the Co-ordinators. They will take a brief look and then, if no major issues are identified, pass it on to one of the vetting team for an in-depth assessment. You will receive their comments via the Co-ordinators within 3 weeks of your route being deemed ready for vetting.
- ❑ **Revisions** – Most Challengers will find they need to make some revisions in light of their Vetter's comments.
- ❑ **Final preparations** – In the Spring you will receive the "Final Details" giving information about Challenge Control, and your Challenge number will be allocated. You will be given a mandatory "In Case of Emergency Form" to complete, which includes details of any medical conditions you have, emergency contact details and information about any GPS tracker you will be carrying.
- ❑ **Go for a walk!** – Finally, you get to set off from your chosen West Coast start point. You will need to phone in a minimum of 4 times at places agreed during the preparation and vetting process. You must finish within 15 days or by 5pm on the final day of the TGO Challenge – whichever is the earlier.
- ❑ **Celebrate your crossing** – Once you have reached the East Coast you must make your way to The Park Hotel in Montrose to formally finish. You will receive your Challenge T-shirt, have a chance to share your experience and you can also attend one of the celebratory dinners. Please note the cost of the dinner is not included in the entry fee.



Alistair Pooler

Timeline

Experience Form



Sue Oxley

Vetting



Stuart Potter

Celebratory Dinners



COMMUNICATION

From entry until the start of the Event you can contact us via:

- ❑ **Email** – This is our preferred method of communication. We will use the email address given on your entry form so please let us know if this changes. Please add tgochallenge@gmail.com to your address book and mark it as a “safe sender” to avoid messages from us being blocked by your server or landing in your spam filter. Once your route has been submitted just one Co-ordinator will deal with any subsequent emails pertaining to it, so it may take up to 4 days to respond to some emails. If you have not heard from us within 6 days, please contact us again.
- ❑ **Phone** – If you need to discuss any issues too complex for an email you can contact one of the Co-ordinators by phone – details on the [Contacts](#) webpage.
- ❑ **Social media** – We have an active Facebook group for communicating with other Challengers but please don't use this for queries aimed at the Co-ordinators.

We will never share your contact details with anyone, including your Vetter, without your permission. Some Vettors may include their email address, so you have the choice of contacting them directly. If you do, please ensure the Co-ordinators are copied into any direct communications about your route.

Once the Event starts on 7th May the way we communicate will change. Challenge Control has different, dedicated phone numbers and there is a facility to WhatsApp and text as well as phone - full information will be given in the Final Details which will be circulated in the Spring.

WITHDRAWALS

Note that your last chance to withdraw without losing all of your entry fee is **13th December 2025** – see [2026 – Terms and Conditions](#) . If you need to withdraw for any reason, please let us know as soon as possible. Places cannot be deferred or transferred to another person.

PREPARING YOURSELF AND YOUR EQUIPMENT

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. [Andy Howell](#) produced an excellent set of YouTube videos in 2018 which remain very relevant. Sadly, Andy has passed away so please don't try to send questions to him.

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 have been in the last few years, at least 3 nights long walking at least 20km (can be shorter if over rough ground or significant ascent) between camps whilst carrying a full pack.



Issy Silkowski

[Facebook Group](#)

[Contacting the Coordinators](#)

[Challenge Control](#)

[2026 Terms and Conditions](#)

[Rich Jones' Blog](#)

[Andy Howell's Videos](#)



Rachel Sheldrake



- ❑ 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 Co-ordinators. 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, it may be better to give you time to gain these essential skills and participate in 2027 or perhaps you might consider our new event for next year which is TGO Challenge East – see paragraph below.

NEW FOR 2026 - TGO Challenge East

This is a shorter event of 6 – 8 days starting between 14th – 16th May from eight points along the A9 corridor using 15 to 20 pre-set routes to suit differing levels of experience finishing on the East Coast by 22nd May. This gives participants who may initially lack the necessary experience or confidence for the main Challenge a taste of it by coinciding with its second week. Successful completion would qualify people for TGO Challenge entry in subsequent years. There will be a separate entry system for TGO East, which will open on 29 November 2025 at 12 noon GMT. For more information, please contact tgoceast@gmail.com or call Mick Blackburn on 07714 329 917 or Ali Ogden on 07786 628 105.

FITNESS AND EXPERIENCE

You don't need to be super-fit to walk across Scotland, but you do need a basic degree of fitness and a good dollop of determination. It is your responsibility to ensure you are fit enough to participate and tackle the route that you have planned. We do not require written proof of your fitness but if

- River Crossings
- Navigation
- Leave No Trace Camping
- First-aid Skills for Backpacking
- In Case of Emergency (ICE) Form



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 [TGO C26 - Terms and Conditions](#). They must accept that Scotia Challenge Ltd, 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.

you have any longer-term illnesses or injuries, we strongly advise that you discuss them with your doctor or nurse making sure they are aware of the nature of the TGO Challenge.

The fitter you are, the more you will enjoy the Event. The best preparation is to get out there and walk with a Challenge-sized pack whenever you can, whatever the weather. Try and fit in some backpacking trips too – a chance to familiarize yourself with new equipment and practise those wild camping skills. It's not ideal to find out your latest purchase really doesn't suit you on day 1 of your crossing!

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.
- ☐ First aid kit.
- ☐ If snowy 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 choose 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.

- ☐ **Ordnance Survey Landranger 1:50,000** maps are recommended to both plan and walk your route. Your Vetter will use these maps.
- ☐ **Ordnance Survey Explorer 1:25,000** 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.
- ☐ **Open source mapping** has improved significantly in recent years and is now used by many planning tools and platforms. However, it still has significant limitations, in particular, no facility to calculate UK grid references and not showing hazards such as crags.

We consider only Ordnance Survey and Harveys maps to be suitable for walking the TGO Challenge. Please ensure any device you rely upon for navigation supports downloading these for offline use. **Our sponsors OMN offer free access to all Challengers for 8 months, so all Challengers have access to digital OS maps.**



PATHS, TRACKS, BRIDGES AND FENCES

Paths are marked on Ordnance Survey maps 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 on the Access Page.

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.

PREPARING YOUR ROUTE

INTERACTIVE MAP

An interactive map, showing much of the information in the following pages can be viewed [here](#). In addition to general information on start points, ferries and transport hubs, the interactive map also shows MBA bothies and some other shelters, as well as our latest information on river crossings and access issues. The map is also updated each year based on feedback from Challengers.

STARTING YOUR CROSSING

You have a choice between 14 different start points, each giving a very different experience. 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.

How you are going to get to your start point is worth considering at this point. There is some information on how to access each of them in the start point information and more on the travel page.

WHAT TYPE OF ROUTE?

The choice is yours, but here are a few things you might want to consider before you delve into the detail.

- ☐ **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 hearts. Many people mix and match periods of solitude with a taste of the famous Challenge camaraderie.



John Moore



Interactive Map

Start Points

Travel Page



Liz Steel

Challenger Blogs,
YouTubes and Photos

- ❑ **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.
- ❑ **Rest days.** It is worth considering some rest days, or at least shorter days. They build in some flexibility if you fall behind as well as giving you a bit of rest and recuperation.

FINISHING YOUR CROSSING

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** offers special bed and breakfast rates to TGO Challengers and a limited number of camping pitches in the garden, with access to a shower. These rates can be obtained by phone or email but not online or via booking.com.

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. Details of regularly used crossings are listed [here](#). Other crossings (commercial ferries or private hire) are possible but please check the route is acceptable with the Co-ordinators before making firm bookings.

Gordon Menzies runs a service across Loch Ness exclusively for Challengers. This crossing is booked via the online route sheet.

PLANNING RESOURCES

There are plenty of books and apps listed in the Resources page of www.tgochallenge.com. A good place to start is [Scottish Hill Tracks](#) (Scotways), which describes Scotland's rights of way. The map, available for £1.00, is highly recommended as it gives you an overview of the west to east Rights of Way that can become the core of a lower-level route. It is double-sided so if you want a complete view of Scotland, we advise buying two!

You can draw inspiration from previous Challengers' blogs and videos but remember you should be producing your own unique route, so please take only ideas rather than replicating a whole route. If you are still struggling for ideas or how to connect places talk to the Co-ordinators who can give you some suggestions. The fine detail, though, will still be up to you.



Liz Steel

[Guide to Finish Points](#)

[Park Hotel and Celebratory Dinners](#)



[Ferry Information](#)

[TGO YouTube](#)

[Books, Apps and Websites](#)

[Accommodation](#)

[Blogroll](#)



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.

Not sure about carrying a tracker? – take a look at Caburn's story from 2023 – it might just persuade you . . .

GPS Trackers



Issy Silkowski

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 Personal Locator Beacon, and it is kept within reach at all times.

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.
- ☐ There are a few places where certain conditions apply – see [PIP webpage](#).

Phone-in Points



Kaare Meldgaard

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 ALTERNATIVES

You must provide a Foul Weather Alternative (FWA) 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 unbridged 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:

- ☐ Fording any substantial unbridged rivers e.g. Rivers Ling, Feshie and Geldie.
- ☐ 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 Corrieairack 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.

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 Co-ordinators will post information on the [Access News](#) page on the website on any known projects.



Alistair Pooler

FWAs



Anna-Maria Wedlich



Graeme Dunsire

Scottish Outdoor Access Code



Tim Day

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.

ACCOMMODATION

Wild camping. This is what the Challenge is about! We strongly advise that you carry a tent and those not planning to camp must 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.

MBA 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. MBA bothies are on the **Interactive Map**.

Non-MBA bothies many estate bothies are left open for walkers. If your Vetter knows of one on or near your route they may share the information with you. Please do not post this online as their owners often request their locations are not widely shared.

Campsites marked on maps may no longer exist or accommodate tents and those that do may require pre-booking. Some (e.g. Braemar, Ballater and Aboyne) 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. Prebooking is essential at **Braemar**, **Ballater**, and **Montrose**.

- ❑ **Braemar Caravan Park** - Mike and Peter have kindly reserved all their small tent pitches for Challengers. These are not available online. Please click the accommodation button for information on how and when to book.
- ❑ **Ballater Caravan Park** will once again offer a discount to Challengers who book by phone or email.

B&Bs, hotels and hostels. Most villages and towns offer a choice of accommodation available on most accommodation apps e.g. **booking.com**, **AirBnB** and **Visit Scotland**. Please note remote buildings named on the map as 'Lodge' do not usually provide accommodation.

Hostelling Scotland offers a discount on all its hostels within the Challenge area and there is also a network of **Independent Hostels**.



Graeme Dunsire

Accommodation

Mountain Bothies
Association

Wild Camping

Human Waste



Domenique Drew-Martin

Hostelling Scotland
Offer

Special places

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, Erroirie, 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 will 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) usually welcome Challengers for food, accommodation and camping.
- ❑ **Dalwhinnie** – Lee at the **Old School Hostel** will hold resupply parcels (but asks that they are not sent too much in advance of the Event as he has limited space) 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.
- ❑ **Laggan Community Hall (Speyside), NN 614 944** – offers basic accommodation in the hall. Contact Jeanette Macpherson jeanettemmm@btinternet.com
- ❑ **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** – A sale has been agreed with the prospective owners planning to keep it as a hostel and will likely welcome Challengers. For now, bookings cannot be taken. Further updates will be given once the situation becomes clearer.
- ❑ **Tarfside** – St Drostan's Hostel is run by Challenge volunteers offering light refreshments, beds on a first come, first served basis (no prebooking) and camping on the village green. They cannot hold resupply parcels. So as not to overwhelm the locals or exhaust the volunteers we ask that those who visited during their previous crossing look for an alternative route to the coast.

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. **Basecamp Food** are offering a 20% discount to challengers using discount code TGOC2026 (excluding sale or already discounted items). If we secure any other discounts for challengers before the start of TGOC2026 these will be noted on the **Special Offers** page of the website.

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.



Graeme Dunsire



Caburn Chamberlain



Mole Cole

Tarfside



Andrew Cooke

Special Offers

Postal Restrictions

Resupplies inc. Gas/Fuel



HAZARDS

All Challengers should be familiar with the hazards of remote and mountainous terrain but here are a few things you need to think about on your Challenge.

Climate. Scottish weather is gloriously unpredictable, which is why well planned FWAs are important. A forecast for more than 48 hours ahead is at best an educated guess so you need to be prepared for all possibilities.

- ❑ **Wind.** Scotland is the windiest country in Europe. You might choose to take your FWA because of rain, but it is wind speed that is more likely to make it a necessity. For example, the Lairig Ghru is an infamous wind tunnel. You need to ensure your shelter is up to Scottish conditions.
- ❑ **Rain.** Combined with wind, at some point you will experience Scotland's speciality of horizontal rain! Good waterproofs are essential.
- ❑ **Cold.** Overnight temperatures can be sub-zero in May even in the glens. Snow and ice are common on the hills and may require winter equipment or force you to retreat to your FWA. Windchill can be significant at times at all altitudes.
- ❑ **Heat.** It can be hot and sunny too. In recent years heat exhaustion has been a problem for several Challengers. You need to know the signs and how to avoid and treat it.

River crossings. Heavy and persistent rain can change an unbridged river from a gentle burbling burn into an uncrossable raging torrent. Vettors 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 suddenly 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 via the information button and from [Mountaineering Scotland](#). As a rule, if the water is above your knees, you probably shouldn't be in it. Although frustrating, diverting in search of a better crossing point 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.

Water. This is generally abundant in Scotland, but it can become trickier to source after prolonged dry spells. In recent years several Challengers have suffered stomach upsets, probably linked to contaminated water, so we advise you to select water sources carefully and to treat all water by boiling, filtering or by purification tablets.

Animals. The biggest risk to your health is from one of the smallest creatures.

- ❑ **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](#)



Paul Abu-Rabie

Heat Exhaustion

River Crossings



Craig Jenkins

Road Walking



Stefan Leyland

Ticks and 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.
- ❑ **Adders** are our only venomous snake but are relatively shy. Bites are uncommon and rarely cause long term problems.
- ❑ **Midges** are rarely a problem in May. If we have a warm spring, you may encounter some in sheltered spots especially near water.

COMPLETING YOUR ROUTE SHEET

Your first step is to decide in which format to submit your route:

- ❑ A detailed written route description with or without GPX files attached.

OR

- ❑ A GPX led route – new for 2026 – where the GPX files are the primary source of reference with fewer details required in the route description section. How to fill in your routes sheet using this option is explained [here](#).

For all routes, we must have the distance, ascent, overnight halt points & grid reference and high day columns filled in. All routes must also have the Phone-in Points section completed (at least 4 required).

Once your route has been planned you need to submit it to the Co-ordinators via the 2026 online [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 [Filling in your Route Sheet](#) webpage and/or view the YouTube video first, even if you are an experienced Challenger, and **use the [Check List](#) before submitting it for vetting.**

GPX FILES

The Vettors and Challenge Control find these useful so if you have prepared your route on a digital platform please add them to your submission. We need each day to be a separate file or subfile. They can be presented as:

- ❑ **One or two files with individual days and FWAs as subfiles.** This is our preferred option, but not all platforms (eg OS maps) let you do this. GPX studio is a good tool for linking individual days.
- ❑ **Separate files for each day's main and FWA routes.** If you are unable to create subfiles please send individual files via a shared folder or zipped file and the Co-ordinators will link them together.

Please note that unless you chose to take the GPX led option, we still require a complete, stand-alone route description of your detailed route plan (in addition to the distance and ascent figures) on your Route Sheet.



Sue Oxley



Kaare Meldgaard



Ian Murray

[Online Route Sheet](#)

[Filling in your Route Sheet](#)

[Checklist](#)

[Phone-in Points](#)

[Helpful route planning videos](#)

[Exporting GPX Files](#)

[GPX-led Route Submissions](#)

SUBMITTING YOUR ROUTE

We acknowledge all routes. When you submit the route sheet, you will receive an automated notification of receipt, as well as an automated email. The email will contain a link to your Route Sheet form (so you can access it to make future revisions, if necessary), a copy of your submitted Route Sheet form and a Word Version of the Route Sheet for your use. If you do not receive this within 24hrs please check your spam and then contact the Co-ordinators. One of the Coordinators will assess your route before sending it to a Vetter for an in-depth review.

You may be asked to revise it before it is vetted, if there is essential information missing, the route is difficult to follow or not advised for any reason (e.g. doesn't fit with your experience or excessive road walking).

The Co-ordinator who picks up your route submission will generally follow it through until it is signed off. This provides some continuity but may mean a delay of a few days in answering queries depending on the Co-ordinator's availability.

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.

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 Vettors 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 Vettors 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 Co-ordinators 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 by completing a Vettors' information form.



Tim Day

Route Vetting

Vettors' Information
Form



Graeme Dunsire



VETTER COMMENTS

Your Vetter will return comments to the Co-ordinators who, after reading them, will send them on to you. Vettters work at different speeds so this may take up to 3 weeks. Please acknowledge receipt of your comments. Every year a few go astray so if yours have not arrived within 4 weeks of submission please contact the Co-ordinators.

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 Co-ordinators. Use the link given when you submitted your route for the first time to make the necessary changes.

Text cannot be highlighted within the online route sheet so please summarise the changes in the revisions box on the route sheet in order to prevent the Coordinators and Vettters having to play "Spot the Difference"!

- ☐ **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 Co-ordinators 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 #TGOC26

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.

REUNIONS

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

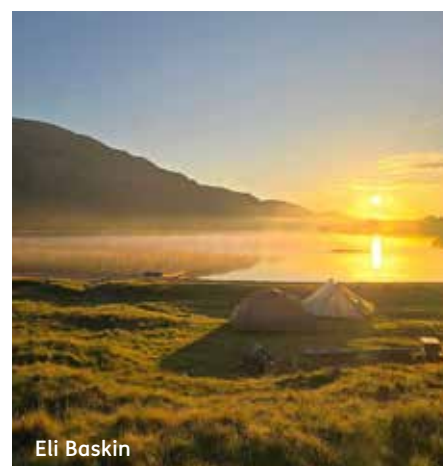
The [Hill and Mountain Walking Club](#) was formed in 1989 by Challengers and welcomes new members. They hold regular meets throughout the UK and abroad, offering the chance to meet up with Challenge friends as well as taking in a few hills.



Craig Jenkins



Kaare Meldgaard



Eli Baskin

Challenge News

Facebook

Instagram

Reunions

Hill and Mountain
Walking Club





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.

Darn Tough

Surveys show that Darn Tough are the number one brand worn by 'Thru hikers' in the USA tackling some of the toughest trails in the world. Exceptional durability, comfort, top performance in a huge variety of conditions and of course the Legendary Lifetime Warranty make Darn Tough socks the top choice when planning an epic.

Made with a blend of Merino wool, nylon, and Lycra for excellent moisture-wicking and temperature regulation, durability and fit, the socks are constructed with tightly packed terry loops to offer blister preventing cushioning where it's needed.

When planning your kit for the TGO Challenge, put a pair or two of Darn Tough socks on your essentials list and if you make it to the East Coast there will be a fresh new pair for you free of charge in the finishers pack as a thank you from us for completing the UK's own epic 'Thru Hike'.



[Click here for website](#)



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