

Fàilte gu Bealach na Bà


Welcome to Bealach na Bà

This amazing road will take you over the mountains of the Applecross Peninsula, rising from sea level to a top height of 626 m (2,053 ft).

’S e Am Bealach an rathad dhachaigh
The Bealach is the road home

Visitors love the Bealach with its hairpin bends and epic views. And it is also the road to and from home for around 230 people who live on the Applecross Peninsula.

The Gaelic name for the peninsula is *A’ Chomraich* (‘the sanctuary’), a name dating back to the religious settlement founded here by St Maelrubha in the 7th century AD. Today Applecross is still a peaceful and beautiful sanctuary for local people and visitors.



So, please drive carefully, enjoy your trip over the Bealach and into Applecross, and respect this special place.

Crofts and fields,
Arlie Fletcher (age 9),
Applecross Primary School

Ann an ceumannan a’ chruidh—
no nan clèireach?
In the footsteps of cows —
or clerics?*

‘Bealach na Bà’ (pronounced ‘Bee-al-uch nu Ba’) is Gaelic for ‘pass of the cow’ although in the past it was also known as ‘Bealach nam Bò’ (‘pass of the cows’). Singular or plural—do you think the two names mean the same? What we do know for certain is that cattle drovers used this route to take herds of Highland cattle on foot to markets in the south.

Or you might prefer the theory that the name comes from ‘Bealach an Abo’ (‘pass of the abbot’—perhaps dating back to Applecross’s early Christian past).



*To find out more about local placenames, visit the Applecross Placenames Project <http://www.applecrossplacenames.org.uk/map/>

Fiosrachadh riatanach mun Bhealach
Bealach essential facts

- The first road through the Bealach was built in 1822. Before then, there was no road into the Applecross Peninsula.
- The road between Tornapress and Applecross is about 11.4 miles (18.2 km) long, with the highest point roughly half-way.
- At some points, for every 5 metres you travel, you are climbing (or descending) 1 metre in height. The average rise/fall is 1 metre in every 14.
- Look out for drystone walls beside the road, built to stop landslides.



Image courtesy of Lewis Mackenzie

Image courtesy of High Life Highland and Am Baile

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

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eireachdail seo
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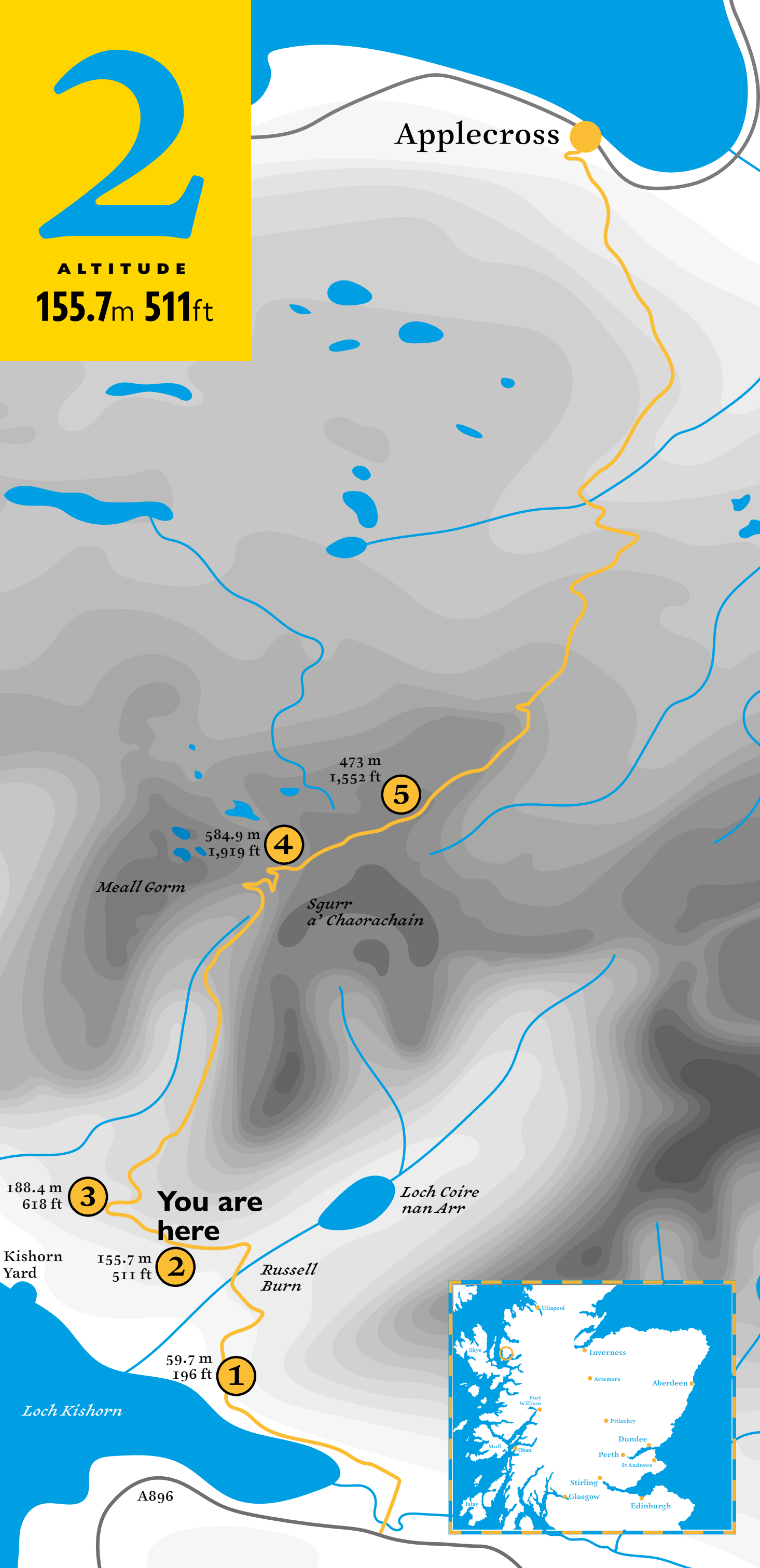
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PANELS PRODUCED BY ROWAN TREE CONSULTING, INVERNESS; DESIGNED BY JULES AKEL



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Obair-togail mhòr Construction on an epic scale

Can you see the Kishorn Yard on the shore below?
In the mid-1970s, over 3,000 people lived and worked at the yard, making oil platforms for the North Sea.

*Digging down a dusty hole till we can hardly speak
Summer sunshine, rain or snow, we seldom stop to sleep
We work for forty hours a day and fourteen days a week
Remember we're the Kishorn Commandos*

**A verse from “The Kishorn Commandos”
by the folk band, Gaberlunzie, 1976**

Now known as Kishorn Port and Dry Dock, the site is one of the largest dry docks in Europe. It specialises in undertaking work for the renewable energy sector, oil and gas and decommissioning industries, and the aquaculture sector.



The road over the Bealach na Bà has **cliff scenery** giving it a close resemblance to an **Alpine pass**, and a **seaward view across to the Isle of Skye**.... (It) descends to Applecross through **woods of great beauty** which, after the **moonlike desolation of the stony plateau**, make a deep imprint on the mind.... **Wild irises and foxgloves and roses** grow by the roadside but the fields are tiny.... The work of **crofting and fishing** gets done, but in leisurely fashion. The clachans have the charm of **remoteness and cutoffness**.

The Highland Landscape, W.H. Murray, 1961

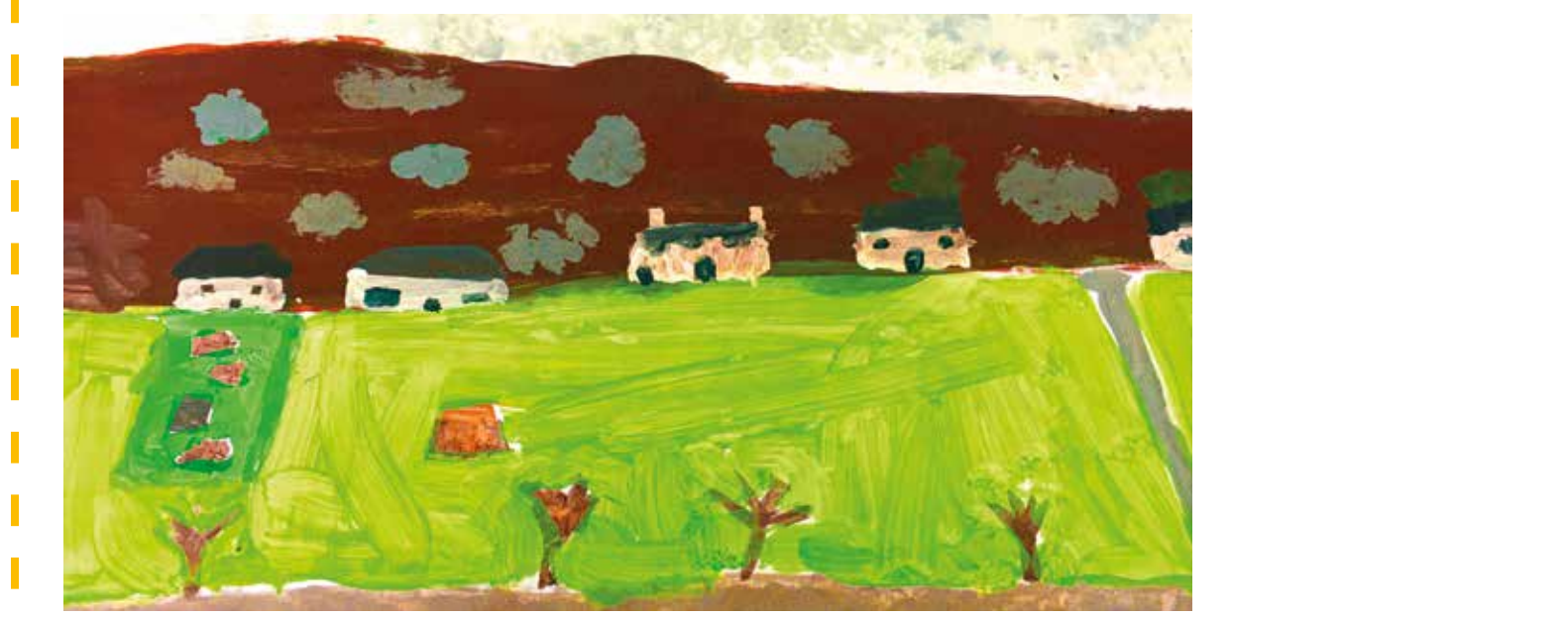
Things have changed in Applecross since 1961, but the experience of crossing over the Bealach and descending down into the Peninsula's woods, flower-

rich croft fields and clachans (small groups of crofts) is as striking as ever.

Many local people still work at crofting and fishing, the area is still remote, and only around 230 people still live here. However, the community aspires to

be ‘sustainable, resilient and prosperous’, and the local filling station, public toilets and broadband scheme are all community-owned. Other community projects include developing affordable housing, community woodlands, allotments, a community hydro scheme, and active travel.

Once you have crossed over the Bealach, please take time to stop and explore. There are woodland walks, a lovely loch, sandy beaches and scenic shorelines, a network of paths for walks and cycling, a fascinating Heritage Centre, amazing archaeological sites and much, much more—all waiting to be enjoyed.



Crofts and fields, Applecross Primary School



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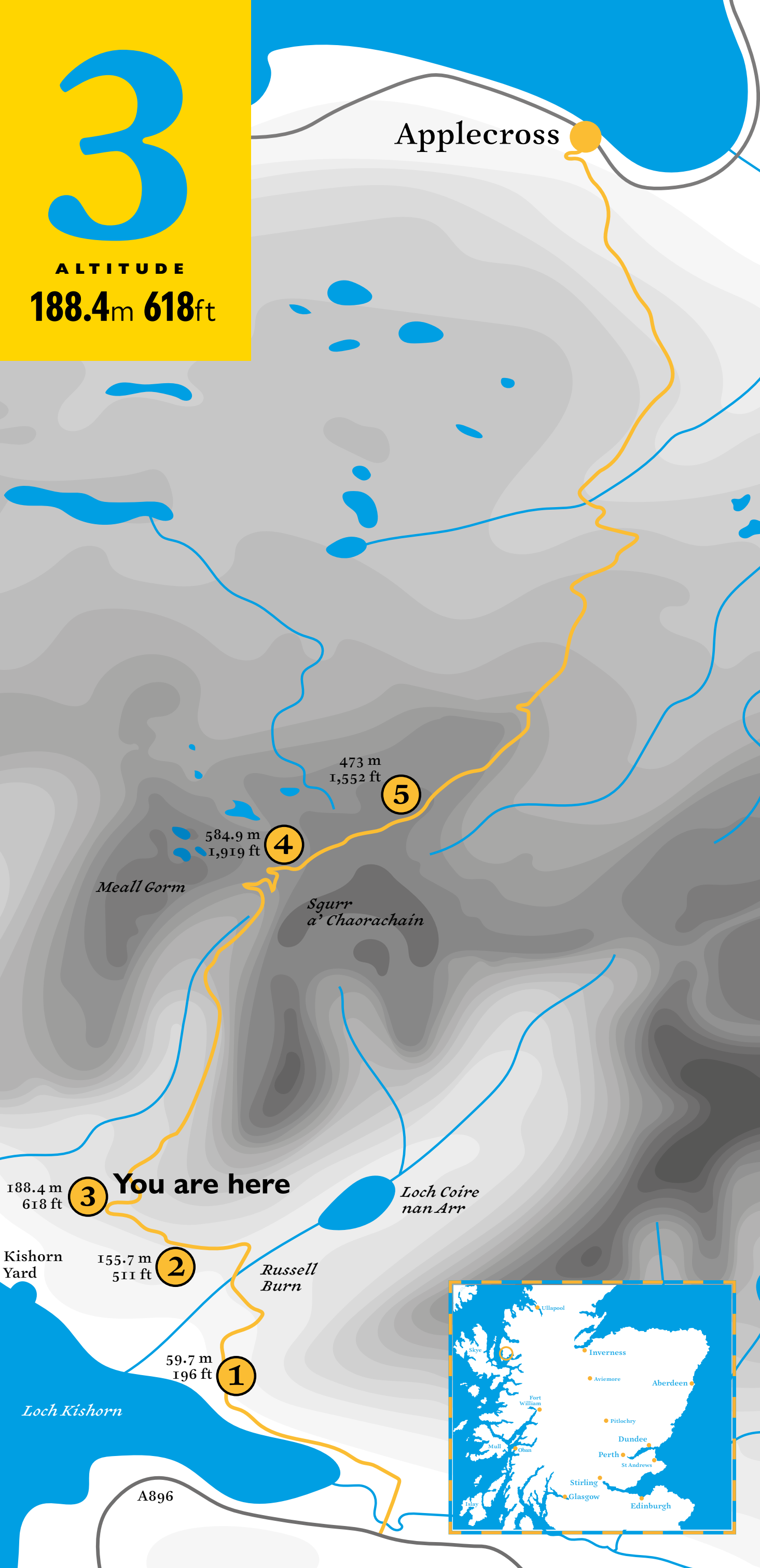
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Tha sgeul an cois gach beinn
Every mountain tells a story

The dramatic mountains here aren't just awe-inspiring as scenery—they also have an awe-inspiring geological story to tell!

Sgùrr a' Chaorachain ('mountain of the torrent') on your right and Meall Gorm ('green hill') on your left were formed around 750–1,000 million years ago by rivers depositing layers of sand and pebbles. Over millions of years, these compressed to form sandstone rock. As time passed, large movements in the earth tilted the layers slightly downwards towards the west, while water, wind and ice gave the hills their shapes.

An robh fios agad?
Did you know?

The ridges and scattered boulders you can see on these hills are quite new in geological terms—they are traces of an icefield which retreated around 11,500–12,500 years ago.



Can you see the sandstone layers in the mountains? Imagine the huge periods of time it must have taken for them to form

An robh fios agad?
Did you know?

Before the Bealach road was built in 1822, the only way in or out of the Applecross Peninsula was through mountain passes or by sea. Bealach na Bà is steep but other routes were even worse—for example, Bealach nam Fàradh or Bealach nan Àradh ('pass of the ladders')—up which, a traveller in 1842 wrote, 'the deer themselves can hardly scramble'.



Chan e beanntan casa
an aon dùbhlán an seo!
Steep mountains aren't the only challenge here!

*Midgies are beag
But seem so mòr.
Because of the marks they leave.
Obh!*

By Lili Jones (age 11), Applecross Primary School

Crofts and mountains, Applecross Primary School
The mountains of the Bealach are part of the fascinating wider geological story of the North-west Highlands.

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Tìr nam beann Mountain country

Once you reach the top of the Bealach (2,053 feet, 626 metres above sea level), you are in mountain country. Even in summer, you may see the weather change rapidly and wonder where the warm sun you left at sea level has gone.

Winter often means deep drifts of snow covering the land and road. If you are here in winter, you will be thankful for The Highland Council staff who grit and clear the road. Conditions can sometimes be challenging, to say the least!



Deep snow drifts on the Bealach
Image © The Highland Council



The Bealach in winter, Applecross Primary School

Innleachdan gus mairsinn beò Survival strategies

It can be challenging up here also for animals and plants, but some have special survival strategies. Look out for mountain hares and ptarmigan, who change colour with the seasons to hide from predators.

Plants have adapted too. Walk up Beinn Bhàn ('white hill')—a Site of Special Scientific Interest close to the Bealach—and you will see a wide range of alpine and sub-alpine plants. Dwarf juniper, oceanic mosses and liverworts, alpine saw-wort, dwarf cornel and rare alpine bearberries

Right, bristly swan-neck moss, one of the plants which have adapted to living in this challenging setting



all thrive on the exposed summit, high cliffs, rock screes and deep corries.

You may spot golden plovers up here too—or even golden eagles.



Left, ptarmigan in summer and right, in the winter
Images courtesy of Neil McIntyre



Left, mountain hare in summer and right, in winter
Images courtesy of Neil McIntyre



Left, a golden plover in breeding plumage; right, a Golden Eagle
Golden plover image courtesy of Mark Hamblin/scotlandbigpicture Golden eagle image courtesy of Peter Cairns/scotlandbigpicture

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Red deer stag



An early motorist on Bealach na Bà. The road wasn’t tarmacked until the 1960s

Image courtesy of High Life Highland and Am Baile

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Breacan lannireach

Sparkling patchwork

Many lochans (small lochs)—some with their own Gaelic names – dot the landscape here below the road, forming a sparkling patchwork foreground to spectacular views over to Scalpay, Raasay and the mountains of Skye.

LOCH

Paint splattered
Reflective of the soaked blue sky, luscious green silk shrubs.
Reflecting the moonlight.

By Arlie Fletcher (age 9), Applecross Primary School



Land, sea, mountains, Applecross Primary School

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