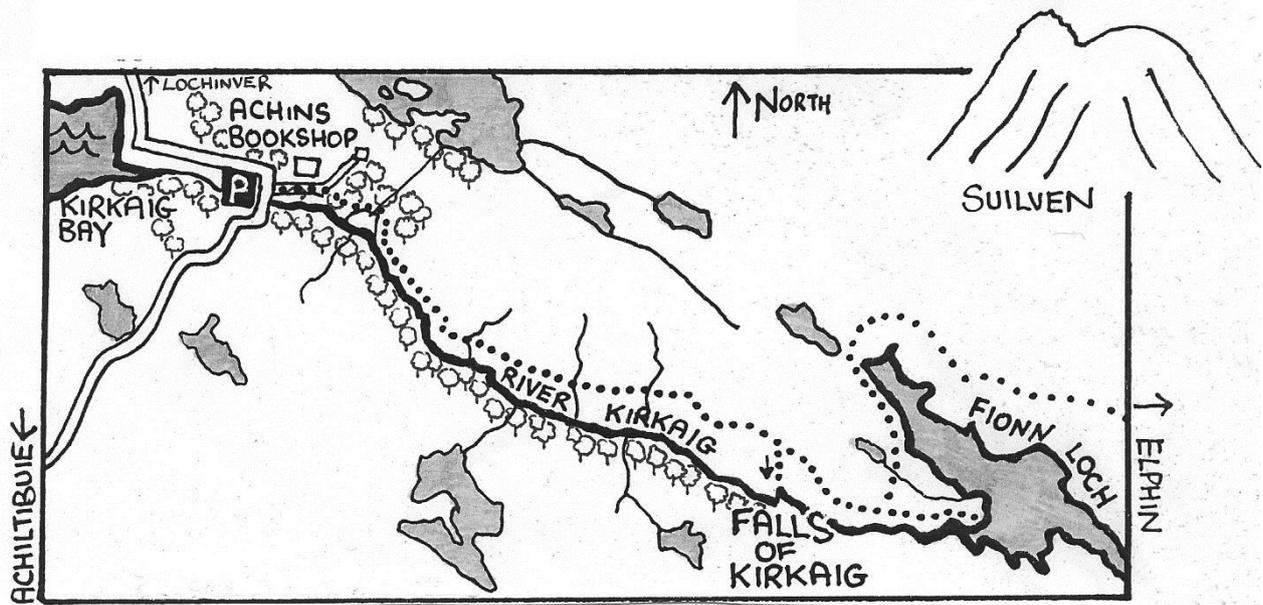


# FALLS OF KIRKAIG



Distance: 8km (5 miles) to the waterfall and back.

*But remember you don't have to go all the way there.  
This is a beautiful riverside walk however far you get.*

Time: Allow 2-2½ hours plus time for stops

Terrain: A rough path all the way, which can be wet and muddy in places. Be careful on the slippery path down to the waterfalls. Walking boots recommended.

Start: Inverkirkaig car park.

Map: OS sheet 15 (Loch Assynt).

Caution: Dogs under control.

This popular walk gives superb views of River Kirkaig and the 20m (60 feet) waterfall, as well as the mountain Suilven. In fact it is used as an approach to Suilven by climbers. The path continues after the Falls to the beautiful Fionn Loch (another 1km) and eventually all the way to Elphin (another 14km). The land to the north of the path is now owned by the community of Assynt (the Assynt Foundation).

## Route:

The path starts at the car park at the bridge below Achins bookshop. Cross the road and head through the kissing gate up a wide gravel path. After 200m take the narrow path through the trees that branches off to the right through the trees. Please do not go through the metal gate leading to a private house. You will pass through a small gate and another kissing gate down by the river edge.

After following the river edge for 2 km the starts to climb above the gorge and eventually out of the trees into the heather clad moorland. The path gives great views of the mountains of Coigach to the west and as you round the corner, the magnificent rounded dome off Suilven comes into view. After 1½ km, look out for the junction, which will take you down to the Falls. The path here is badly eroded but the final descent to the viewing places is on rocky steps. Be careful!

You can now retrace your steps back to the car park or continue another 1 km to the shores of Fionn Loch. The path may get very muddy and wet nearer the loch. The route to Suilven lies this way but is a longer and more serious exercise requiring proper equipment and expertise.

## What to see:

This walk incorporates many of the wildlife-rich habitats of Assynt in one short walk. The walk starts under the canopy of the multi-stemmed hazel trees, graceful birch, rowan, aspen and holly trees. This sheltered woodland is a remnant of the once extensive Northwest Forest and is full of breeding redpols, willow warblers and tree pipits. In spring the woodland floor is a delightful carpet of primroses, wood sorrel, wood anemone and dog violet, which later in the year is covered in waist-high bracken. The old metal gates and rusty wire remind you, that not so long ago Inverkirkaig Common Grazings had their sheep fank here.

As the path draws close to the river you are likely to be “buzzed” in summer by patrolling colourful dragonflies. Highland and black darter, 4-spot chaser and the magnificent gold-ringed hawk all feed on hatching insects. The river here is a mixture of slow, silent pools and fast flowing, swirling water, with every boulder a staging post for dippers and grey wagtails. Peer into the deep pools in July and August and you may see a Kirkaig salmon making its way up to the spawning beds. The number rocks along the path are the fishing beats.

The River Kirkaig flows out of Fionn Loch (the white loch) through a three billion year old, ancient landscape of Lewisian Gneiss, 4km into the sea at Kirkaig (an old Norse word meaning place of the Kirk). The river forms the Sutherland and Ross-shire boundary. Keep checking the other side of the river for red deer, wildcats and pine martens.

As you leave the riverside into the open hillside, listen for the cuckoo, a sound that strikes fear into the many meadow pipits nesting in the heather. Look out for the male stonechat doing sentry duty on the whin bushes. Green tiger beetles scurry across the path in May, while later in the year you are as likely to see a slow worm or an adder warming up in the early sun. And don't forget to look up and search the horizon for the many buzzards, ravens and maybe even a glimpse of golden eagle or tiny merlin.

The Kirkaig Falls are formed where an old volcanic intrusion crosses the ancient bedrock to form a hard barrier to the flow of the river. It is the end of the line for the ascending salmon. Try as they might they cannot jump it. Further on up the path is Fionn Loch, one of Assynt's finest brown trout waters and where you may see red-throated divers flying in with food for their young. On the sides of the loch greenshank, common sandpiper, dunlin and golden plover raise their broods in safety

## Safety:

Remember the weather here can be unpredictable, so be prepared. Wear sensible clothing and footwear. Please keep dogs on a lead. Close all gates and leave no litter. Keep to the path during stalking season (1<sup>st</sup> August- 21<sup>st</sup> October).

Fishing permits for the River Kirkaig from CKD Galbraiths [sporting@ckdgalbraith.co.uk](mailto:sporting@ckdgalbraith.co.uk) and for Fionn Loch from the Assynt Angling Club at the Tourist Information in Lochinver or the Lochinver Post Office.

### For further information, contact:

**Highland Council Countryside Rangers**  
**Assynt Visitor Centre, Main Street, Lochinver**  
**Sutherland IV27 4LX**  
**Telephone: 01571 844654**  
**Email: [andy.summers@highland.gov.uk](mailto:andy.summers@highland.gov.uk)**

*Please save resources and return this leaflet or pass it on to a friend.*

