



Loch Creran

Marine Protected Area

A flame shell © SNH

Home to rare and wonderful biogenic reefs

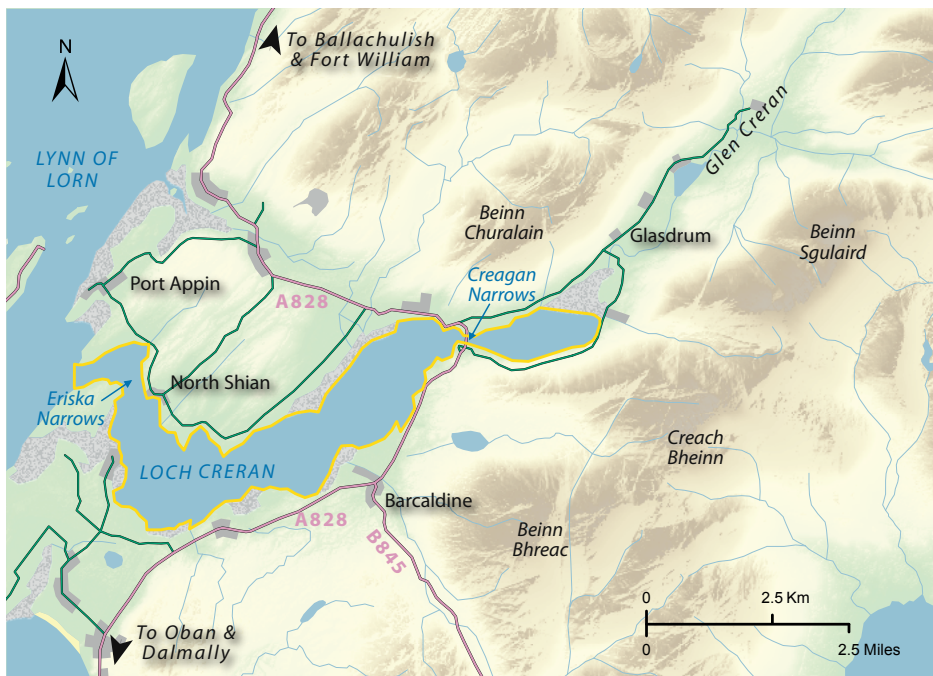
Loch Creran

Marine Protected Area

Loch Creran is a small but remarkable sea loch on the west coast of Scotland to the north of Oban. Carved into the landscape by glaciers during the last ice age, the loch has four deep basins separated by rocky sills.



The conditions change from the entrance of the loch to its head. The bottoms of the basins are deep, dark and still while the currents are accelerated over the shallow sills at Eriska and Creagan. These two areas of rapid tidal flow supply the necessary food and aeration for the formation of flame shell beds. The largest lies to the south of the Eriska Narrows at North Shian, with the smaller found at the western entrance to the Creagan Narrows.



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Location: 56° 31.940' N 005° 20.583' W

Area: 12 km²



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Flame shell beds are home to lots of other animals

Protected Features & Conservation Objectives

Biodiversity: flame shell beds.

Geodiversity: Quaternary of Scotland.

The aim is to **conserve these features** in order to make a long lasting contribution to the MPA network.

Flame shells are bivalve molluscs meaning they have two shells like a mussel. Their shells are white, quite small (up to 4 cm long) and oval shaped with lengthwise ridges on them. Their name comes from the thick fringe of red and orange tentacles which protrudes from between their shells. Flame shells build nests by binding together gravel, stones and kelp with their beard or byssus. Hundreds of these nests can combine to form a dense turf or bed which stabilises and raises the sea floor.

The Marine Protected Area (MPA) boundary overlaps the Loch Creran Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for bedrock reefs and biogenic reefs of horse mussels and serpulid worms.

The range of habitats present within the loch is exceptional, from still mud with Norway lobsters and seapens on the floor of the deeper basins to the brightly coloured dead man's fingers, sponges and anemones clinging to the sea bed in the tide-swept narrows. The existence of flame shell beds, horse mussel beds and serpulid reefs greatly enhances the biodiversity of the loch. These habitats provide a stable home and an elevated position in the water column for a myriad of other plants and animals including seaweeds, whelks, starfish, brittlestars, crabs, sponges and sea squirts.

Further Information

Further information on Nature Conservation MPAs, the wider network and protected areas management is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-environment/mpanetwork

For Nature Conservation MPA site documents and more on the fascinating range of marine life to be found in Scotland's seas, please visit

www.snh.gov.uk/mpas - for territorial waters

www.jncc.defra.gov.uk/scottishmpas - for offshore waters



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Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Loch Creran from Beinn Sgulaird, looking down to the Creagan Narrows



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