



TGO Challenge 2021 – Final Details

Firstly, a big thank-you for sticking with us and being so flexible over the last few months. It has been something of a rollercoaster ride since we opened for entries in September.

This year's crossing will feel a little different – lower numbers, less snow and quite probably more midges – but it will still be the same TGO Challenge where the only aim is to walk every step coast to coast across Scotland. Numbers are similar to the early 1980s – enough for the famous Challenge camaraderie and, if restrictions ease as planned, informal gatherings of up to twelve outside will allow Challenge tales to be swapped too. TGOC21 can be both social and distanced!

Scotland's weather is as gloriously unpredictable in June as it is in May so, as ever, you need to be prepared for all possibilities: rivers in spate necessitating long detours, frosts are still possible and (you never know your luck!) it might be fine and sunny too so pack your sunscreen along with this year's essential accessory – the midge net ...

Before you head to the West Coast, please read through these pages carefully as they contain some information essential for your crossing – including details of Challenge Control, the phone numbers you will need, your Challenge number and an updated list of participants.

CHALLENGE CONTROL

VOICE CALLS – 07562 083 996 TEXTS – 07593 185 124

PLEASE QUOTE YOUR NAME(S) AND CHALLENGE NUMBER(S) – SEE PARTICIPANTS LIST, PAGE 11

Please note: we will not be using the usual landline number this year as Challenge Control will be based in Newtonmore during the first week of TGOC21.

BEFORE YOU START

MEDICAL INFORMATION AND EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

Please complete the form (which can be found [here](#)) and send it to the Coordinators at newtonmorehostel@gmail.com as soon as possible.

Please note: completing this form is a requirement for participating in TGOC21.

We will not pass any comment or judgement on your fitness. It is up to you to ensure you have a suitable level of fitness to participate and we encourage you to get out and test your capabilities as restrictions ease. If you have any long-term health problems or other concerns about your health, we strongly advise you to seek advice from your health professional, making sure they are fully aware of the nature of the Event.

The form asks for your Covid-19 vaccination status. It is not a requirement to be vaccinated to participate but the information may be useful to the emergency services in a rescue situation. We also require details of your emergency contact(s). It is important that they:

- are not participating in TGOC21
- give their consent to Challenge Control holding their details
- know you are participating in and understand the nature of the Event
- understand that Challenge Control (and the Police if Mountain Rescue are involved) will contact them if you have missed a phone-in or there is concern for your welfare
- have access to your GPS tracker beacons/map if you are using one.

Information given will be held securely, treated confidentially and deleted immediately after the Event. Only the Coordinators, Challenge Control staff and, if relevant, the emergency services will have access to it. Please note, due to data protection regulations we can no longer hold emergency contact details on your route sheet – any information given here has been deleted.

COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

We need to ensure the chances of Covid-19 being contracted during the Event are kept to a minimum – not only for the welfare of Challengers but also for the communities they pass through. If all goes to plan, Scotland will be under Level 1 restrictions (summarised [here](#)), which means at the start of the Event we will be able to:

- socialise in groups of up to 12 from 12 different households outside
- socialise in groups of 8 people from a maximum of 3 households in indoor public spaces (eg hospitality settings)
- socialise in groups of 6 from a maximum of 3 households in a private dwelling.

In all these circumstances different households should remain socially distanced.

With regard to travel you are advised to avoid car sharing with other households and you must still use face coverings on public transport. You will not be able to enter any Level 3 or 4 areas in the case of localised outbreaks.



We will circulate up-to-date guidance shortly before the Event and notify you of any changes during the Event via text, email and social media.

During the Event all participants are required to:

- Abide by Scottish Government legislation (and that relevant to areas travelled from/through) during the Event even if fully vaccinated.
- Carry, and use when appropriate, face coverings and hand sanitiser.
- Ensure tents or bedrooms are not shared with anyone from a different household.
- Ensure no informal gatherings of more than the guidance at the time allows. Be aware, some Challenge groups may contain more than one household.
- Ensure suitable distancing when camping. If you find more than 6 tents in the area, move on and camp elsewhere.
- Follow [MBA](#) advice on the use of bothies and treat estate bothies in the same way – currently they should only be used in case of emergencies/extreme weather.
- Abide by restrictions put in place by start point venues and accept there may be a significant wait to sign out from busier start points e.g. Dornie, Oban, Mallaig, Shiel Bridge.

- Accept there will be no organised social gatherings (e.g. Callater Lodge, Tarfside) and informal gatherings at these locations should be avoided. In particular, please do not camp on the playing field at Tarfside (unless authorised during 2021 route vetting).
- Log the date, name and number of any Challengers contacted for more than 15 minutes.
- UK residents – please test yourself for Covid-19 before the Event (ideally 1 and 3 days before departure) and again on returning home. Lateral flow tests are available free of charge and can be ordered [here](#).
- Overseas participants – adhere to current UK Government regulations re quarantine and testing.
- Consider downloading the Protect-Scot app – please note this requires Bluetooth to be activated on your device so may affect your battery usage.
- Not to travel to the Event, or retire as soon as possible during the Event, if you develop Covid-19 symptoms, test positive or are told by any contact tracing agency that you need to self-isolate.
- Inform Challenge Control if you, or a member of your household, test positive for Covid-19 during the Event or the 10 days before and after it.
- Accept that sign-in procedures when you reach the East Coast may change at short notice if restrictions change during the Event.

Some of these restrictions may not be necessary by 18th June, but you should plan for all the above. Whilst most communities will welcome the Challenge as usual, and the positive effect it has on the Highland economy, there will also be some nervousness about the risk of spreading Covid-19. We therefore need all Challengers to strictly observe any restrictions deemed necessary by the Scottish Government or the Coordinators in June as we cannot risk the reputation of the Event or losing the goodwill it has built up over the last four decades. Therefore, anyone found to be breaching Covid-19 guidance will be subject to a one-year ban from the Event.

WITHDRAWALS

We understand many Challengers, particularly those from overseas, may be subject to travel restrictions at short notice. Therefore, up to 17th June anyone who withdraws, for any reason, will be offered a 2022 (or 2023 if preferred) place at a 50% discount. Everyone who participates in the Event from 18th June onwards will also be guaranteed a place in 2022/3 but will have to pay the full entry fee.

CANCELLATION

We hope the measures above and the successful UK vaccination programme will minimise the risk of TGOC21 being cancelled, but we have to be realistic – it could happen if there is another wave of Covid-19 infections and restrictions had to be tightened. If this happens during the Event we will contact you by text and email as soon as possible and all participants would then be entitled to a 2022 or 2023 place at a 50% discount.

GPS TRACKERS

If you are planning to use a GPS tracker, also known as personal locator beacons (PLBs) or satellite messengers, please give a link to your personal map on the [Medical Information and Emergency Contacts](#) form. **Please note: You must still phone in as planned even if we have access to your beacons.**

Your GPS tracker will not be checked routinely by Challenge Control unless you have missed a phone-in or we have other reasons to be concerned about you. You must ensure someone at home is checking your beacons/messages regularly. Ideally, they should be one of your emergency contacts. Please **DO NOT** use the Coordinators' or Challenge Control's email address or phone numbers as one of your contacts.

We have had several instances of devices failing, causing anxiety to family and friends whilst the Challenger has been, thankfully, fine. Therefore, we will not initiate a search just because your tracker is not moving – we need some other indicator, such as a missed phone-in, that you may be in trouble. Therefore, you need to discuss with your emergency contact what they will do if your tracker stops transmitting. Challenge Control will, of course, be happy to talk to your emergency contact(s) about your welfare.

ACCOMMODATION DETAILS

If you haven't already done so, please send us the name and phone number of any accommodation you have pre-booked. This helps us greatly when trying to locate overdue Challengers. Please add the information to your route sheet in the Overnight Halt Column and send it to us.

SETTING OFF

SIGN-OUT REGISTERS

You can sign out between 9am on Friday 18th and 5pm on Monday 21st June. Contact details for start points can be found in the [Event Details](#) and at www.tgochallenge.co.uk. All of the start points we have contacted are happy to hold the register as usual. The registers are normally held at reception, with the exception being Glenelg where the register hangs in the porch of Mrs Davidson's house, Taobh na Mara, which is close to the War Memorial. If any start points require an altered system or are not available, we will make alternative arrangements and let anyone affected know by email. No one will be asked to move their start point.

Please be patient. Remember that we have to fit in with the normal business hours of the establishments that kindly agree to hold the registers, so please don't get upset if there is a delay. The sign-out process may take longer than usual due to Covid-19 restrictions and access to the building may be limited so at busy start points, e.g. Dornie, Oban,

Mallaig and Shiel Bridge, there may be a significant wait if you want to start between 9 and 11am on Friday. If you are able to start later in the day that would be helpful.

If anyone is uncomfortable with entering a sign-out establishment, please let the Coordinators know and we can arrange an alternative.

If for any reason you are unable to start, you must inform us as soon as possible and cancel any accommodation you have booked.

ALONG THE WAY

CHALLENGE CONTROL

This is how you contact us during the Event for your regular phone-ins, weather forecasts, to notify us of a change in your route or if you need to retire from the Event. A friendly and confidential ear is always available if you need help and advice, feel unsafe or uncomfortable or need to report any concerns.

This will be based in Newtonmore during the first week moving to The Park Hotel, Montrose, for the second week.

VOICE CALLS – 07562 083 996

TEXTS – 07593 185 124

Please add both numbers to your phone's contacts. Please note the voice call number is different from previous years as we will not have access to the Park Hotel's landline during the first week.

Open 9am-9pm daily from Friday 18th June to 5pm Friday 2nd July.

Overnight please send a text or, in an emergency, phone the voice call line.

Staffed by experienced Challengers – Mick Blackburn, Gayle Faulkner, Alan Hardy and Ali Ogden.

Please give your **name(s)**, **Challenge number(s)** (see page 10) and **location** each time you phone or text.

We much prefer to talk to you so if you have enough signal and charge please ring rather than texting.

Texts sometimes go astray so please do not assume your text has arrived safely and remain in an area with a signal until you have received a reply.

Please do not use the voice lines for texts or the text line for voice calls. It is difficult to record information from texts if the phone is being used for a voice call!

During the Event please **do not** leave important or time sensitive messages on Facebook, Messenger, Twitter or Instagram, or by email or use our usual contact phone numbers (01540 673 360 / 01540 673 583) after 17th June as these will not be regularly monitored during the Event.

PHONE-INS

These are the core of our safety system.

- ❑ **You must ring in from every phone-in point on your route sheet. Failure to do so may result in the emergency services being contacted unnecessarily.**
- ❑ Please phone as soon as you arrive at your phone-in point – send a text or leave a message if after 9pm. Do not wait until the morning – it is all too easy to forget!
- ❑ If behind schedule, please try to phone on the designated day, or as soon as you have a mobile signal; do not wait until you reach your official phone-in point.
- ❑ We're happy to hear from you, especially solo participants and those on higher routes, in between planned phone-ins so if you have a signal, pass a payphone, or have the opportunity to use a landline, make the most of it and let Challenge Control know where you are.
- ❑ If you decide to change your route, or are delayed, let us know personally, and not by a third party, at the first opportunity.
- ❑ If you have to retire from the Event, you must let us know as soon as possible and definitely within 24 hours.
- ❑ Overseas participants – if you intend to buy a new SIM card on arrival in the UK please let Challenge Control know your new number as soon as possible, and definitely before you set off from the West Coast.

ACCESS

Please see the [Event Details](#) for general information and check the [Access](#) page on the Challenge website before you leave for specific information, including missing bridges. In particular, we ask you to respect the reasonable estate requests in areas such as Glen Muick and Glen Mazeran.



LOCH NESS FERRY

Gordon Menzies sails from Temple Pier (NH 528 300), a mile from Drumnadrochit, at approximately 8am and 5pm. Please pre-book, if you haven't already done so, by email to gordonlochness@gmail.com, and confirm your place by text (07831 434 691), including the names of all in your group, when approaching Drumnadrochit. Covid-19 restrictions may reduce his boat's capacity so Gordon may need to cross several times, but he will endeavour to get everyone across to Inverfarigaig (NH 517 237) as soon as he can.

ACCOMMODATION AND EATING OUT

This year it may be difficult to find accommodation on the day so you are strongly advised to book prior to the Event. If you do not have a booking in a town or village where you intend to stay you must be prepared to walk on and wild camp if necessary. The same applies to eating out in popular places – pre-booking may be essential and it might be worth making enquiries before you leave home.

Please be aware many Highland communities have had bad experiences with so-called “fly camping” by roads and at beauty spots following the release from last spring's lockdown. We cannot risk the TGO Challenge's good name by any association with this so let us set a good example to less experienced visitors. We ask you camp at least 1km outside of villages/towns, making sure you are not visible from any road or occupied property, and of course leave no trace when you depart. In particular, please do not camp by the Clunie Water near Braemar or by Loch Ness in Fort Augustus.

Campsites. These may be a particular issue this year, so we have contacted many that are frequently used. Government advice on communal sanitary facilities remains vague so many are unsure if they can take tents without their own sanitary/washing facilities.

Campsites not taking tents for 2021 (or requiring a long stay) include:

Loch Aboyne Caravan Park

Rothiemurchus Camp & Caravan Park,

Coylumbridge – they plan to welcome Challengers again in 2022.

Loch Ness Resort (formerly Cumberlands), Fort Augustus – a permanent change which means there is no longer a campsite in the village

Gairloch Holiday Park

Lazy Duck, Nethy Bridge – permanent change

Shiel Bridge – currently for sale and no indication whether it will continue as a campsite

Torridon – the free campsite will not be available, but the public toilets have reopened.

Sites intending to open but currently not taking bookings for backpacking tents until communal facilities policies are clarified include:

Ballater Caravan and Camping Park
Eastmill Road Caravan Park, Brechin
Borlum Campsite, Drumnadrochit
Glendaurel Caravan & Camping Park
Camping in the Forest, Glenmore
Spey Bridge Caravan & Camp Park, Newtonmore.

The following are currently taking bookings for backpacking tents but pitches are limited to reduce pressure on communal facilities so must be pre-booked:

Blair Castle Caravan Park, Blair Atholl
Braemar Caravan Park
Cannich Woodland Camping
Glen Nevis Caravan & Camping Park
MacDonald Hotel & Cabins Kinlochleven
South Links Holiday Park, Montrose – (full on 1st/2nd July but will increase capacity if restrictions ease further)
Morvich Caravan Club
Deeside Holiday Park, Peterculter – minimum 2-night stay
By the Way, Tyndrum.

Please note this list is not comprehensive. We strongly advise contacting and pre-booking any campsite you intend to use.

Hostels – many are operating at reduced capacity with closed communal areas and others are not open or only available to single household groups so again please ensure you pre-book.

Bothies – as yet there is no indication when MBA bothies will re-open so you should assume they will not be available for TGOC21. If you find a bothy door is open please do not use it as many have been left unlocked in case of the need for shelter in a true emergency. We would ask that you treat private estate bothies in the same manner. There is no problem with wild camping in the vicinity of most bothies.

Wild camping – please ensure you respect Covid advice when camping making sure you are suitably distanced from anyone camping nearby and do not gather in groups larger than the Scottish Government regulations in place at the time allow. Be prepared

to move on if there are already more than six tents at your planned pitch. Please be scrupulous in taking away all your rubbish and leaving no trace wherever you walk or camp.

There are many establishments that offer Challengers a warm welcome and have done so for many years. Covid-19 restrictions mean many will have to moderate their hospitality this year.

Ault na Goire – Janet and Alec Sutherland will be offering hospitality as usual. Please contact them in advance (janet.sutherland@talk21.com or 01456 486 711) to arrange camping, takeaway food or send a resupply parcel.

Cougie – we have not yet heard from Melanie so, for now, please assume no food or camping is possible.

Callater Lodge, and most probably the MBA bothy, will not be open. Bill Duncan wishes all Challengers well and looks forward to offering the usual welcome in 2022. We have a significant number of routes planning to camp in the vicinity so please be prepared to move on if the area around the Lodge looks busy.

Mar Lodge will not be offering refreshments or holding Challengers' parcels this year.

Newtonmore Hostel – unfortunately, we will not be open to Challengers for accommodation or tea and cakes this year as our hostel is, for now, a self-catering cottage. We will hold parcels and can buy in gas canisters if need. Please email us before sending a parcel.

Loch Erich Hotel, Dalwhinnie are offering camping in the grounds as usual but will not be able to offer showering facilities. Their restaurant and toilets will be open.

Laggan Coffee Bothy is normally closed on Wednesdays but will open on 23rd June to welcome Challengers.

St Drostan's, Tarfside will not be open and, unless you have been given the go-ahead to do so by the Coordinators, you should not camp on the village playing field. There is no real point in going through the village if you are heading down Glen Esk as The Retreat will also be closed. The bridge at Dalbrack gives access to the south side of the river, avoids a significant amount of tarmac and gives access to potential wild pitches.

The Burn, near Edzell is offering camping, showers, breakfast and dinner to Challengers. Please pre-book by emailing burn@goodenough.ac.uk as they will not be able to accommodate Challengers ad hoc.

Please note we do not have any control over the organisation of any formal or informal accommodation, bothies or gatherings so you use them at your own risk.

SAFETY

Emergencies

If the situation is serious, dial 999 or 112 and ask the Police to contact Mountain Rescue.

North American participants: please note that 911 does NOT work in the UK. If you are in difficulty but don't need the emergency services call Challenge Control for help and advice.

If you only have enough signal for a text you can still contact the emergency services if you have previously registered your phone. Text "register" to 999 and follow the instructions.

Phone-ins

These are our main safety system. Please phone as soon as you arrive at your phone-in point or whenever you have a signal if you are behind schedule.

Maps and navigation

Whether using physical maps or electronic devices you should have a backup. Devices may run out of battery or malfunction and paper maps can blow away. Only OS or Harvey's maps are appropriate for the TGO Challenge. Sadly, the successor to the much-missed Viewranger app does not support maps that we consider suitable. Whatever you use you must have sufficient leeway either side of your route to allow for intentional or unintentional diversions. We suggest 10km or the next major glen or route to either side as a minimum.

All members of your team must be able to navigate independently and should have their own maps. We ask that you follow the Mountaineering Scotland and Mountain rescue services request to download the OS Locate app if you do not have a navigation app that can quickly provide emergency services with an accurate grid reference. This is preferred to the What3Words app.

River crossings

Your vetter may have warned you of potentially difficult crossings. However, bridges may have been lost over the winter and in extreme conditions even small streams can become difficult or impossible to cross safely. Lindy Griffiths recent experience (click [here](#)) is a sobering account of just how dangerous a normally minor burn can be.

Please ensure you have the relevant skills and experience; if you are in any doubt, and certainly if the water comes above your knees, we advise looking for a plan B. Be prepared to divert substantial distances upstream or put up your tent and wait for the water to recede.

GPS trackers

These devices, also known as personal locator beacons (PLBs) or satellite messengers, are a useful additional safety measure. They are certainly not compulsory but if you are injured and unable to move the capacity to contact the emergency services is invaluable, especially if you walk solo. Their capacity to send tracker beacons can be useful to Challenge Control and the emergency services if there is concern for your welfare as well as being a comfort to relatives and friends at home.

Equipment and fitness

You should ensure both you and your equipment are tried, tested and fit for purpose after a prolonged Covid-induced stay indoors!

It is difficult to know how hill fit we are this year and reduced fitness makes injuries more likely. Don't hesitate to simplify your route – remember FWAs can also be Feeling Weary Alternatives! If your route needs modifying to allow for a change in fitness, please contact the Coordinators.

As experienced backpackers we will not give you an equipment list but please note, even if you are planning a B&B based route, **you must carry a suitable shelter**. You should make sure the contents of your first aid kit are suitable and in date.

Roads

Many Highland A and B roads are blighted by fast traffic including large lorries. Please try and avoid them and take care when there is no other option. Overseas Challengers – don't forget vehicles drive on the left in the UK!

Lyme Disease

Ticks are easily picked up when walking through bracken, heather or high grass. Ticks hide in your warmer regions and bites can go un-noticed. You can buy tick removers for your first aid kit. Learn how to remove them safely and examine yourself for ticks when possible. If you feel unwell and suspect you have been bitten, seek medical advice as soon as possible. Early **Lyme disease** symptoms may include fever, headache, tiredness, and a circular rash. Many Challengers have been bitten and a few have been diagnosed with Lyme disease and successfully treated. Further information can be obtained [here](#). Please be vigilant!

Bothies, shelters and non-commercial accommodation

You need to make your own assessment of risks including the behaviour of others present. For example, we know of at least one occasion when a bothy inhabitant has created a serious fire risk endangering others in the bothy.

Human waste

This must be buried at least 15cm deep and at least 30m from watercourses. Soiled toilet paper and sanitary products should be carried out and disposed of appropriately.

Personal safety

In general, most people feel less at risk from others in the hills than in urban settings and the camaraderie of the Challenge hopefully reduces this risk further. Please be mindful of others and if you witness, or are a victim of, inappropriate behaviour please speak in confidence to Challenge Control.

Extreme weather

You should be prepared for Scotland's unpredictable climate! Whilst snow may be less of an issue, rain and high winds are as likely in June as May. Prolonged hot weather brings the risk of dehydration, heat exhaustion and wildfires. The **Mountain Weather Information Service** (MWIS) provides detailed three-day forecasts from their website and app. The **Met Office**, also gives specific forecasts for some summits. Whilst Challenge Control will check both sites daily and circulates extreme weather warnings by text but you should check forecasts relevant to your route when possible.

We're Waiting for your Call!

It can be wonderful hearing of Challengers' adventures but at Challenge Control it is the phone calls that we don't get which make the job stressful. The tale below from 2018 illustrates just how important it is to phone in on time, or as soon as possible if you are delayed.

Day 2 – 9pm

The phone line is officially closed for the night but at Control we still have work to do. A review of the Challenge ledger gives a list of 15 individuals or groups who have failed to phone in as scheduled. A risk analysis is done on each bearing in mind their experience, type of route, age, confirmed sightings, whether solo or a group and any other risk factors. After careful consideration we text reminders and plan to re-evaluate in the morning.

Day 3 – 9am

Several apologetic messages account for most of the "naughty list". Time for the detective work to start. For those that have given names of B&Bs or campsites we phone the establishments. This takes another few off the list, but concern crystallises around one Challenger who was never booked at the remote hotel on his sheet. As other Challengers phone in we start asking about sightings of our missing few and this one in particular.

Noon

A few more have phoned in and we have confirmed sighting of others – most simply forgot but a few have been delayed by slow progress or injury. Another attempt to contact the Challengers directly and one answers. Just two left now – a pair of first timers and an experienced solo Challenger. We know how much a phone call to an emergency contact can cause distress and worry so it's a last resort. We risk assess the two cases again – call log, ledger and route sheets are double checked – and decide to wait another few hours.

3pm

Still nothing. Time to phone the contacts. The pair are quickly accounted for so just our solo Challenger left. Surprisingly his emergency contact had not heard from him for many months and was unaware of his participation on the Challenge – not helpful from our point of view and worrying for his family. We search the start lists and route sheets for those on similar routes looking for late starters who will, in effect, sweep the route and send texts asking for any sightings.

4pm

We have a sighting! Reports of him travelling very slowly on his first day under a huge pack and camping 10km short of his planned destination. He had declined offers of help and advice to send unnecessary gear home. We now know he is behind schedule rather than having walked through his phone-in point which narrows down a potential search area. We are minded to give him another night until . . .

5pm

A report comes in saying our missing Challenger leaves camp before several quicker Challengers but none of them pass him again. So, where is he? Lying injured out of sight of the track? Now we have serious concerns about his welfare.

We have a big decision to make. Phone calls are diverted to the Park reception. We have speculated much – theories he has travelled fast and gone through early were replaced with speculation he is moving slowly or has even gone home and not told us. Now we must draw together the facts – an experienced Challenger but no recent crossings, no direct contact from him, now nearly a day overdue, the phone-in point doesn't recognise his description and reports from other Challengers that he is struggling and/or injured. Yes, most likely he is just moving very slowly but there is a significant risk he isn't moving at all . . . We dial 999 and ask for the police.

6pm

After a frantic hour emailing route sheets to Mountain Rescue and defining the area he is likely to be in we are now serving tea to two Montrose Police officers being reassured we have done the right thing – to have waited longer would have lost valuable hours of daylight. Mountain Rescue are walking the relevant section of his route from both ends and police are visiting his home address to check he hasn't returned home. Two more reported sighting of him "being in a bad way" heighten our concerns.

10pm

The search has been called off as the light fades. There have been several difficult phone calls to his family who are understandably distressed, but we can offer no reassurance. We now start preparing the next "naughty list". A bed is set up by the phone in the Control room but not much sleep is had amid nightmares of losing our first-ever Challenger.

Day 4 – 5am

Mountain Rescue resume search.

9am

A text from one of the late starters tells us he walked with him for a day but left him camping a few miles short of his phone-in point. We inform the police just as they contact us on another line to say he has been found. The cheer at Challenge Control is probably audible throughout Montrose. We can now focus on the next overdue list.

Noon

We finally speak to the Challenger. He is unaware of the anxiety caused and plans to continue but after a frank discussion we advise him to stop and retired him from TGO19. It has taken four days to walk two days of his route, he is unwilling to lighten his load and seems unconcerned at the level of concern caused.

Our elation is now tinged with frustration. This whole episode was preventable. There was a good signal where the Challenger camped on his first night. A phone call to Control telling us he was behind schedule would have prevented his family's distress, our anxiety and many hours of Police and Mountain Rescue time . . .

Please ring us as soon as you arrive at your phone-in point. To us it is the day you are due to phone, rather than the place, which is most important. If you are behind schedule or struggling, check your phone for a signal and please, as soon as you can, ring and let us know.

2021 Facts and Figures

We would like to extend a warm welcome to the 45 people who will be crossing for the first time. As ever, first timers are the life blood of the Event.

This year our youngest Challenger will be 20-year-old Bradley Jordan who will be crossing with his grandfather Alan. At the other end of the age scale we have three octogenarians joining us. Our senior man is John Burt (82) closely followed by senior woman Jean Turner (81), and Alan Kay (80). John and Alan will be on their twentieth crossings along with Bert Hendrikse who will be our first overseas Challenger to achieve this landmark, whilst Derek Hopkins and Jim Davidson will be celebrating their tenths. Our most experienced Challenger is Graham Brookes on his twenty-eighth crossing.

Potential travel restrictions have understandably depleted our overseas Challengers but a plucky 25 are still hoping to participate in June. The Netherlands has reclaimed its place at the top of the list with 10 participants, followed by 4 from Germany, 3 each from Spain and the USA, 2 each from Israel and France and 1 from Belgium.

It's good to see a more even use of start points this year. Mallaig has reclaimed the top spot with 25 starters followed by the other two regular favourites of Oban (23) and Shiel Bridge (18) but the rest are not far behind. Dornie is fourth with 15 followed closely by Strathcarron (14) and Torridon (13). Glenelg has bucked the trend by increasing its share significantly having 12 starters - as does Lochailort. The lesser-used start points have a reasonable number of starters with Kilchoan, Morar and Portavadie on 7 and Plockton and Acharacle with 5. We hope the solo Challenger starting from Ardrishaig doesn't feel too lonely!

Montrose (32) has become the most popular finish point ahead of Stonehaven (24), pushing 2019's most popular finish, St Cyrus (18), down to third. Kinnaber Links remains popular with 16 despite the demise of the Charleton Farm Café. Lunan Bay (15) comes next with beautiful Dunnottar Castle rather surprisingly relegated to fifth with only 12.

The rest are scattered from Fraserburgh (5) to Arbroath (3) with 3 Challengers seeking some solitude on the East Coast with a unique finishing point.

SUPPLIES

Where possible please use local shops – they will appreciate your custom. However, in many areas supplies options are limited so you may need to post yourself resupply parcels. Most accommodation providers will be happy to hold a parcel for you but please ask permission in advance. Gas or other fuel for stoves cannot be posted so you need to think carefully about how you will access them.

When shopping please stick to the usual Covid-19 rules. For groups that means ideally only one member should enter a shop – pen and paper for a list might be useful kit!

MIDGES

For those who have not had the pleasure of meeting them, they are small mosquito-like insects. They do not transmit any serious illnesses but can be a significant nuisance in June. Their bites can cause red blotches or itchy swellings. They fly mainly in the mornings and evenings and they don't like sunshine or wind. Most of us who walk regularly in the Highlands have at some point been "mided" but on most days they are just a minor irritation. It is a case of preparing for the worst and hoping for the best! We would advise that you:

- ❑ Choose your campsite carefully – away from water or boggy patches. Unless it is blowing a gale, make sure your pitch makes the most of any breeze and can catch the morning/evening sun if it shows itself. High camps are less affected but on a still evening we've met them on top of Munros!
- ❑ Carry a midge net, insect repellent and, if you tend to react to their bites, any suitable creams to help with itching.
- ❑ Consider using citronella candles or midge coils but be careful not to start a fire!
- ❑ Make sure your shelter has an inner tent or mesh nest and that this is suitable for midges, not just their larger mosquito cousins.

A FEW RULES

Companions – dogs are not allowed on the Challenge. Anyone breaking this rule will be disqualified.

Unofficial crossings are not permitted. The limit on numbers taking part in the Challenge has been set for sound reasons and with regard to visitor pressures. Anyone crossing with a non-Challenger will be disqualified, although friends or relatives may join you for a few days.

Walk Every Step – you may take transport away from your route for accommodation or supplies but you **MUST** return to the exact same spot before you continue. If you have a gap in your crossing due to injury, illness or fatigue please let us know on Control. We appreciate this is your holiday and many people will have used valuable annual leave so you may of course continue if you wish but it will not count as a completed crossing.

Behaviour – We know the vast majority of Challengers do not need reminding of their responsibilities to others or that they are representing the Event as well as themselves. However, when the drinks flow in some of the towns and villages that welcome the Challenge every year spirits can sometimes get a little high. Please be aware of how your high spirits may affect others.

As the Highlands reopens, many communities, whilst welcoming the boost to their economies, remain anxious of the consequences of an influx of people, so the good reputation of the TGO Challenge is even more important than usual. The Event cannot be policed as such and neither do we want it to be. Its good name relies on the good behaviour, camaraderie, patience, helpfulness and tolerance of its participants. If you see, or are subjected to, any behaviour you feel is inappropriate, including breaches of Covid-19 guidance, please contact Challenge Control at the earliest opportunity.

FINISHING YOUR CROSSING

FINISH CONTROL

When you reach the east coast, please make your way to The Park Hotel, John Street, Montrose DD10 8RJ to complete your Challenge. Motorised transport is now allowed! The 2021 TGO Challenge finishes promptly at 5pm on Friday 2nd July so please make sure you leave time to reach Finish Control before it closes.

We hope to welcome everyone personally in Montrose but exactly how we manage the Finish Register and give you your certificate and T-shirt will depend on restrictions at the time. We will ensure that we comply with Covid-19 regulations and guidance and therefore, if necessary, this may be outside. Details will be sent by email shortly before the Event starts. If anyone is uncomfortable with attending Challenge Control please let us know before or during the Event and we will make alternative arrangements.

If restrictions tighten, our fall-back plan is to arrange sign-outs by phone and post your certificate and T-shirt.

Pin badges – This year they will be produced to order and posted to your home address after the Event. Orders and payment will be taken at Challenge Control.

A WALK TO THE PARK

Reaching the Park Hotel from Montrose Station sometimes proves more difficult than navigating your way across Scotland!

From the station, walk up to the roundabout with its swan sculpture. Keep right, crossing the road where the railing ends, go straight ahead up a small alley (Railway Close) to the High Street. Cross the High Street, turn left, then right down John Street. The Park is on the second corner.

CELEBRATING YOUR CROSSING

We will not be able to hold the usual big dinners, but we plan to hold some smaller gatherings throughout the day on 30th June–2nd July. If the easing of restrictions goes to plan, we hope to have up to 30 people at a time for a socially distanced sit-down meal (lunch, afternoon tea and dinner) in the ballroom. It is a large room, which can be well ventilated, and by the end of June you should be able to have a glass of something suitably celebratory indoors too! Further details will be circulated shortly before the Event.

THE PARK HOTEL

We would like to say a very big thank you to the Park Hotel. Throughout the forty-year history of the TGO Challenge they have made its finish a wonderful event. Over the last 12 months they have been incredibly helpful, resourceful and flexible. They are a family-run business and the pandemic has hit them particularly hard. Whilst we appreciate not everyone will be comfortable in a social setting, we very much want to support them so please consider attending one of the meals, having a drink at the bar or staying the night. Discounted rates are available to Challengers. Please ring 01674 663 400 or email reservations@parkmontrose.co.uk. Please note the discount is not available for online bookings. They have only a few rooms left on Thursday 1st July but good availability on other days.

They will also allow a limited number of tents to camp in the garden with breakfast and access to a shower at a very reasonable rate. This must be pre-booked by phone or email.

PARCELS

You can post clean clothing to Challenge Control to pick up on your arrival in Montrose. Please label the parcel clearly with your name and Challenge number. Post to TGO Challenge, The Park Hotel, John Street, Montrose, Angus, DD10 8RJ. Please, do not send parcels until shortly before the Event as the hotel cannot store them for long periods.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Reunions – we hope that we will be able to hold the usual Scottish Reunion (organised by Kirsten Paterson) in the autumn and the Spring Gathering (organised by Alan Hardy) next year. We will circulate details whenever arrangements are finalised.

Hill and Mountain Walking Club – founded by Challengers, this meets regularly throughout the year both in the UK and abroad. They hope to resume meetings as soon as restrictions allow. You are welcome to come to a meet before joining. Details can be found [here](#).

2022 TGO CHALLENGE

Everyone who participates in TGOC21, as well as those with deferred places from 2020 and 2021, will be guaranteed a place in 2022 if they want one. This may mean an increase in numbers so, if necessary, we will look at staggered starts or two waves over a three-week period. The provisional dates are 13th-27th May with these being extended earlier if needed.

We wish you a safe and successful crossing.

Once a Challenger: Always a Challenger

There are many past Challengers, who can no longer participate but who would like to be involved in some way. Do you know any? If so, please put them in contact with us.

So, don't be a stranger and keep in touch!

TGO CHALLENGE SUPPORTERS

The Great Outdoors Magazine

Created by hillwalkers for hillwalkers, The Great Outdoors Magazine has been providing outdoor enthusiasts with ideas, inspiration and the best gear reviews in the industry for 41 years.

Published every four weeks, Britain's original outdoor magazine is packed full of stunning photography, top class writing and brilliant walking and backpacking routes, along with authoritative gear reviews from the country's most experienced team of testers and essential skills advice from highly qualified outdoor instructors.

Regular contributors include our Gear Editor Chris Townsend – the UK's most experienced long-distance walker – as well as comedian Ed Byrne and respected outdoor writers Jim Perrin, Roger Smith, Ronald Turnbull, David Lintern, Vivienne Crow and Alan Rowan.

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.

