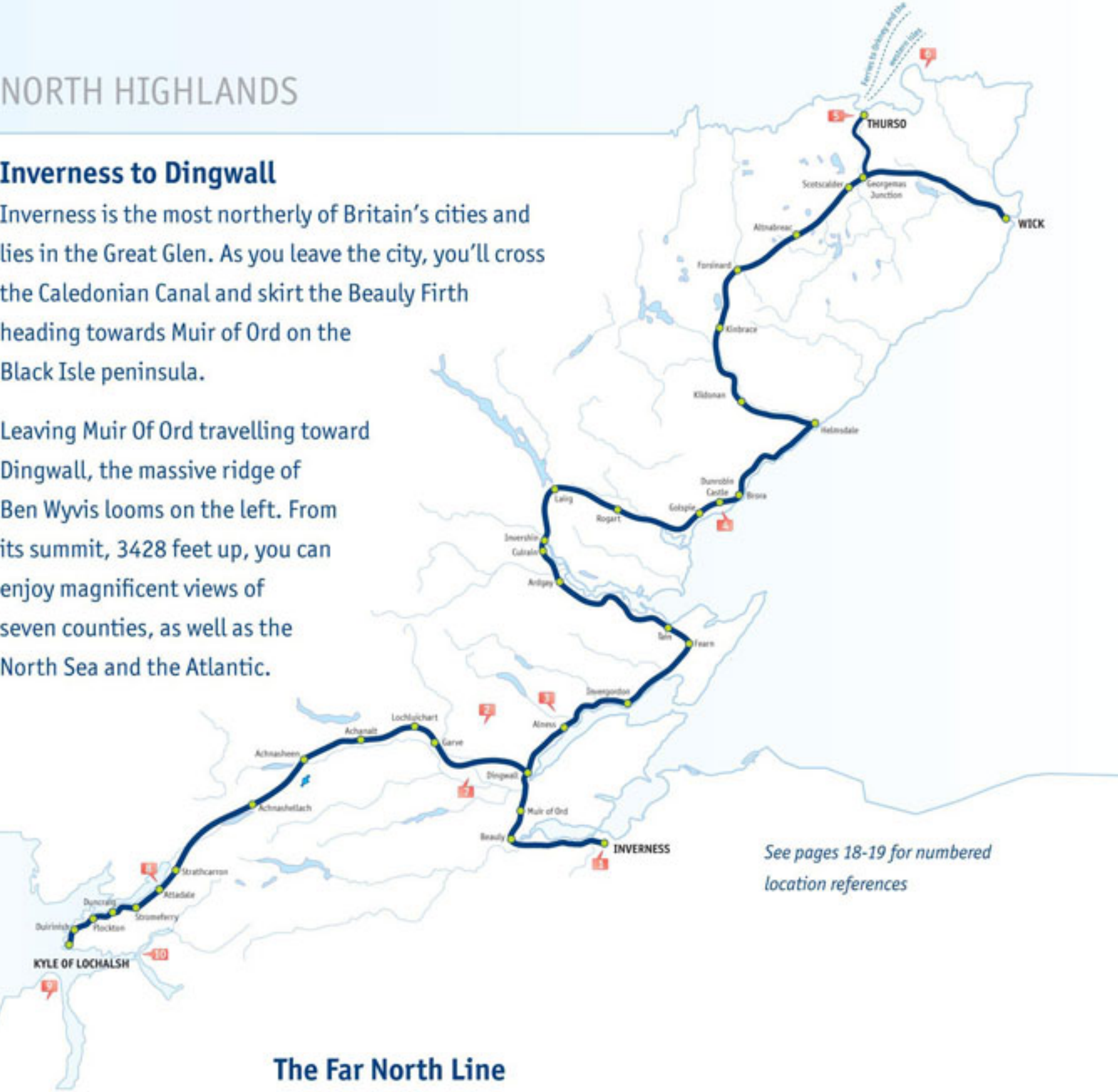


Inverness to Dingwall

Inverness is the most northerly of Britain’s cities and lies in the Great Glen. As you leave the city, you’ll cross the Caledonian Canal and skirt the Beaulie Firth heading towards Muir of Ord on the Black Isle peninsula.

Leaving Muir Of Ord travelling toward Dingwall, the massive ridge of Ben Wyvis looms on the left. From its summit, 3428 feet up, you can enjoy magnificent views of seven counties, as well as the North Sea and the Atlantic.



See pages 18-19 for numbered location references

The Far North Line

At Dingwall the line forks, with the Kyle Line bearing left towards mountainous Wester Ross, while the Far North Line continues to Wick & Thurso.

Travelling along the shores of the Cromarty Firth, passing Foulis Castle on the left, the train sweeps on past Teaninich and Dalmore distilleries; and through Alness towards Invergordon, the site of the 1931 Royal Navy mutiny. As you leave Invergordon there’s another distillery - this is whisky country after all! - and on the right, Nigg Bay.

Moving north via Brora and Helmsdale (this part of the coast is where Scotland’s last wolf was killed in 1745), you will now be approaching Kildonan – referred to as Scotland’s Klondike as it was the scene of the Scottish gold rush in 1868. Prospectors came from far and wide to pan for gold in the Kildonan and Suisgill streams. People to this day still try their luck at panning for gold here.

After travelling through Forsinard, where the station also doubles as an RSPB reserve, then Altnabreac, one of the most remote stations in Britain, the Highland landscape is slowly transformed into the more lowland Caithness – famous for its stone and decorative glass and crystal. At Georgemas Junction the line divides: first North for Thurso and its nearby port of Scrabster; then back east for the county town and former herring port of Wick.



The Kyle Line

From Dingwall, the line to Wick and Thurso continues north, while the Kyle Line turns west through gentle countryside towards the west coast. On the left, just four miles outside Dingwall, lies Strathpeffer village, which was once a fashionable spa and today is still a picturesque tourist attraction.

Now you’re climbing steeply towards Garve and less gentle country. On the right is Little Wyvis, with Ben Wyvis looming behind. After passing through Garve station the line climbs up to Lochluichart, with its hydro-electric power station and wind farm, and tiny Achanalt. Numerous herds of deer can often be spotted in this area from the train.

Further on, wild mountain scenery accompanies you to Achnashellach (Gaelic for fields of the willows). To the west, you briefly see the Torridon Peaks, which provide superb walks for hikers, birdwatchers, climbers and botanists. The mountains close in then it’s past Loch Gowan and up to Luib Summit, which marks the Drumalbain watershed (where the streams and rivers flow west, not east).

Then you’re into the deer-haunted Achnashellach Forest, thick with spruce, willow, birch, oak and holly. In contrast to this beautiful forest, the wide open space of picturesque Loch Carron shortly opens up before us.

Passing through Fearn, you’re now in Tain, a Royal Burgh on the banks of the Dornoch Firth. Across the Firth is another Royal Burgh – Dornoch, with its cathedral dating back to 1224 and its highly-rated golf course. A mile further north of Tain, the Glenmorangie Distillery is on the left, then Balbair Distillery. On the right, you’ll see Skibo Castle, former home of the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie (and more recently famous as the location of Madonna and Guy Ritchie’s wedding).

Running alongside the Kyle of Sutherland, look out for the magnificent Carbisdale Castle on the left. The train heads inland now for a spell towards Culrain, Invershin and Lairg but soon enough travels back out towards the sea again through Rogart and Golspie. See if you can spot the 100ft Mannie – the first Duke of Sutherland - atop Ben Bhraggie on the left.

On the right the North Sea spreads out, then, straight out of a fairytale, appears Dunrobin Castle (remember to keep your rail ticket handy for discounted admission to the castle).

For centuries the Clan Sutherland have called the castle home, and it commands superb cliff-top views of both the gardens and the sea. The castle is also served by its own railway station, which also houses a small railway museum.



Dunrobin Castle



Eilean Donan, near Kyle of Lochalsh

Now the railway reaches the most spectacular section of the journey, hugging the shore beside the towering rock face, twisting and turning past Attadale, where, in past times, Vikings held sporting events and fought ferocious duels.

Presently, Strome Castle can be seen across the water, before winding on, round the rocky shore to Stromeferry, the original terminus of the Skye Railway. Arriving in Plockton, a pretty palm-tree lined village with myriad yachts anchored in the bay, we enjoy one of the most picturesque bays in Scotland, which was also the location for the BBC’s drama series ‘Hamish Macbeth’.

Then we travel through Drumbuie’s crofting area to Duirinish, where the Cuillins of Skye provide a stunning backdrop for the last leg of the journey to Kyle of Lochalsh.

Here you’ll see spectacular views over the Inner Sound to the Isles of Raasay, Scalpay, Longay, Pabay, the Crowlin Islands – and, of course, Skye – where it’s not unusual to see herds of seals undulating in and out of the glistening water. Then it’s past Erbusaig Bay and within minutes you’re in Kyle of Lochalsh.