

# Sutherland

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**Sutherland** is a county in the Highlands of Scotland. Its county town is Dornoch.<sup>[1]</sup> Sutherland borders Caithness to the east, Ross-shire to the south and the Atlantic to the north and west.

In Gaelic the area is referred to according to its traditional areas: *Dùthaich MhicAoidh* (or *Dùthaich 'IcAoidh*) in the northeast, *Asainte* (Assynt) in the west, and *Cataibh* in the east. *Cataibh* is also sometimes used to refer to the area as a whole.

The name *Sutherland* dates from the era of Norwegian Viking rule and settlement over much of the Highlands and Islands, under the rule of the jarl of Orkney. Although it contains some of the northernmost land in the island of Great Britain, it was called *Suðrland* ("southern land") from the standpoint of Orkney and Caithness.

The northwest corner of Sutherland, traditionally known as the Province of Strathnaver, was not incorporated into Sutherland until 1601. This was the home of the powerful and warlike Clan Mackay, and as such was named in Gaelic, Dùthaich 'Ic Aoidh, the Homeland of Mackay. Even today this part of Sutherland is known as Mackay Country, and, unlike other areas of Scotland where the names traditionally associated with the area have become diluted, there is still a preponderance of Mackays in the Dùthaich.

Like its southern neighbour Ross-shire, Sutherland has some of the most dramatic scenery in the whole of Europe, especially on its western fringe where the mountains meet the sea. These include high sea cliffs, and very old mountains composed of Precambrian and Cambrian rocks.

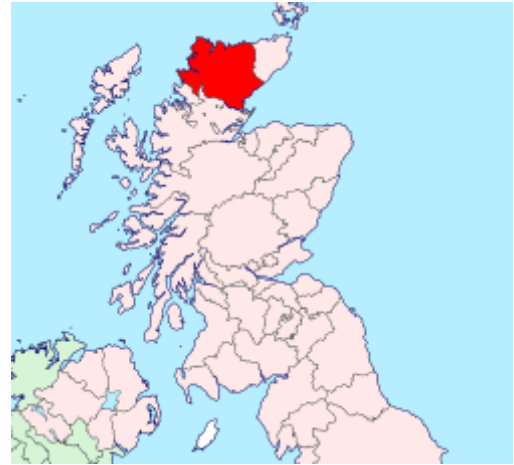
Much of the population is based in coastal towns, such as Helmsdale and Lochinver, which until very recently made much of their living from the rich fishing of the waters around the British Isles.

Much of Sutherland is poor relative to the rest of Scotland with few job opportunities beyond government funded employment, agriculture and seasonal tourism.

Further education is provided by North Highland College, part of the University of the Highland and Islands. The Ross House Campus in Dornoch was the first establishment in the UK to provide a degree in Golf Management. The Burghfield House Campus, also in Dornoch, is an hotel school.

## Sutherland

### County (until circa 1890)



<b>Country</b>	Scotland
<b>County town</b>	Dornoch
<b>Area</b>	
• <b>Total</b>	5,252 km <sup>2</sup> (2,028 sq mi) Ranked 5th
<b>Chapman code</b>	SUT



Sutherland's Coat of Arms

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## Landscape

The inland landscape is rugged and very sparsely populated. Despite being Scotland's fifth-largest county in terms of area, it has a smaller population than a medium-size Lowland Scottish town. It stretches from the Atlantic in the west, up to the Pentland Firth and across to the North Sea. The sea-coasts boast very high cliffs and deep fjords in the east and north, ragged inlets on the west and sandy beaches in the north.

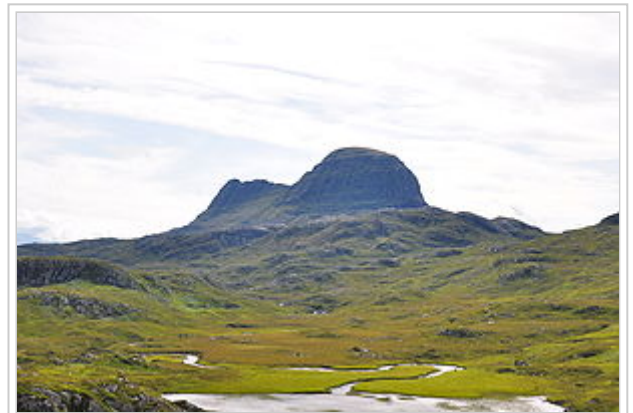
The remote far northwest point of Sutherland, Cape Wrath is the most northwesterly point in Scotland.

Sutherland has many rugged mountains such as Ben Hope, the most northerly Munro. The western part comprises Torridonian sandstone underlain by Lewisian gneiss. The spectacular scenery has been created by denudation to form isolated sandstone peaks such as Foinaven, Arkle, Cùl Mór and Suilven.

Such mountains are attractive for hill walking and scrambling, despite their remote location. Together with similar peaks to the south in Wester Ross, such as Stac Pollaidh, they have a unique structure with great scope for exploration. On the other hand, care is needed when bad weather occurs owing to their isolation and the risks of injury.

Sutherland has many fine beaches, a remote example being Sandwood Bay, which can only be reached by foot along a rough track. The number of visiting tourists is, naturally, minimal.

There are pockets of the native Scots Pine, remnants of the original Caledonian Forest.



Suilven from the Glencanisp Lodge path



Sandwood Bay

Owing to its isolation from the rest of the country, Sutherland was reputedly the last haunt of the native wolf, the last survivor being shot in the 18th century.

However, other wild life has survived, including the golden eagle, sea eagle and pine marten amongst other species which are very rare in the rest of the country.

## Transport

The A9 road main east coast road is challenging north of Helmsdale, particularly at the notorious Berriedale Braes, and there are few inland roads.

The Far North Line north-south single-track railway line was extended through Sutherland by the Highland Railway between 1868 and 1871. It enters Sutherland near Invershin and runs along the east coast as far as possible, but an inland diversion was necessary from Helmsdale along the Strath of Kildonan. The line exits to the east of Forsinard.

Helmsdale is on the A9 road, at a junction with the A897, and has a railway station on the Far North Line. Buses operate about every two hours Mondays-Saturdays and infrequently on Sundays from Helmsdale to Brora, Golspie, Dornoch, Tain and Inverness in the south and Berriedale, Dunbeath, Halkirk, Thurso and Scrabster in the north. These are on route X99 and are operated by Stagecoach in the Highlands, but tickets can be bought on the Citylink website.

There are no airports.

## Highland Clearances

Sutherland is perhaps best known for its saddest memory: the Highland Clearances, the forceful eviction of people from their homes in the 18th century by the landowners to make way for large sheep farms. Sutherland suffered more than most parts of the Highlands, scattering people far and wide across the globe.<sup>[2]</sup> The clearances also saw many forced to move from their inland homes to live along the coast scraping a life as fisherfolk.

It was the villages produced by this policy that formed the last Gaelic speaking communities to be found on the east coast of Scotland, as discovered by Nancy Dorian in the early 1960s, and there are still some native speakers of the East Sutherland dialect of Gaelic in this area.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Civil Parishes

Out of the 871 civil parishes in Scotland listed on the General Register Office for Scotland website,<sup>[4]</sup> 13 are identified on the Wikipedia List of civil parishes in Scotland as being in Sutherland. In addition, the list states that Reay used to be partly in Sutherland, until 1891.

Civil parishes are still used for some statistical purposes, and separate census figures are published for them. As their areas have been largely unchanged since the 19th century this allows for comparison of population figures over an extended period of time. Refer map at.<sup>[5]</sup> The following individual parish population figures, giving a total population of 12,650 at the 2011 Census for the 13 Civil Parishes (1930 boundaries), were extracted from Census Table QS112SC using the interactive Standard Outputs system at the Scotland's Census website<sup>[6]</sup>



Sutherlandshire.

<http://archive.org/stream/imperialgazettee02wilsuoft#page/n83>

Parishes outlined in red

- Assynt 1011
- Clyne (see Brora) 1765
- Creich 1106
- Dornoch 2402
- Durness 345
- Eddrachillis (see Kinlochbervie, Scourie) 674
- Farr 945
- Golspie 1641
- Kildonan (see Helmsdale) 725
- Lairg 887
- Loth (see Lothbeg) 139
- Rogart 458
- Tongue 552

**Other settlements** include:

- Bonar Bridge
- Brora
- Durness
- Embo
- Helmsdale
- Kinlochbervie
- Lairg
- Lochinver
- Scourie
- Strathy
- Tongue

## Local government 1890 to 1996

In 1890 Sutherland became a local government county, with its own elected county council, under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1889.

At that time, one town within the county, Dornoch, was already well established as an autonomous burgh with its own burgh council. Dornoch, a royal burgh, had its own Burgh Council but did not serve as the county's administrative centre.

The County Offices for Sutherland have always been in Golspie and remain so with the new County Offices at Drummuie.

In 1894 Parish councils, covering rural areas of the county were established.

In 1931 the parish councils were superseded under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1929.



In 1975 the Local Government council and the burgh council were superseded under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. The 1973 act also created a new two tier system, with Sutherland as a county within the Highland region.

In 1975 the Sutherland District Council was created as one of eight council districts of the Highland Region.

In 1975, under the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the council area was divided between Caithness and Sutherland local government council districts within the Highland region, with Tongue and Farr areas of the council of Sutherland becoming part of the Caithness district (which also included the area of the county of Caithness).

Also, the Kincardine area of the council of Ross and Cromarty was merged into the new Sutherland district. Shortly after its creation, however the boundary between the districts of Sutherland and Caithness were redrawn to follow that between the counties.

In 1975 the region was also created as one of nine two-tier local government council regions of Scotland. Each council region consisted of a number of districts and both regions and districts had their own elected councils.

## Management area and area committees, 1996 to 2007

In 1996 Local Government in Scotland was again reformed, to create 32 unitary council areas. The Highland council region became the Highland unitary council area, and the functions of the district councils were absorbed by the Highland Council.

In 1996, Sutherland and the other seven districts of the Highland council region were merged into the unitary Highland council area, under the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994. The new Highland Council then adopted the former districts as management areas and created a system of area committees to represent them.

Until 1999 the Sutherland management and committee areas consisted of seven out of the 72 Highland Council wards. Each ward elected one councillor by the first past the post system of election.

In 1999, however, ward boundaries were redrawn, but management area boundaries were not. As a result area committees were named for and made decisions for areas which they did not exactly represent. The new Sutherland committee area consisted of six out of the 80 new Highland Council wards.

In 2007 new wards were created for elections, polling on 3 May and, as the wards became effective for representational purposes, the Highland Council's management and committee structures were reorganised. The Sutherland management area and the Sutherland area committees were therefore abolished. The management area is now divided between two of the five new ward management areas of the council's new Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross corporate management area.



The Royal Burgh of Dornoch



Cape Wrath from the sea



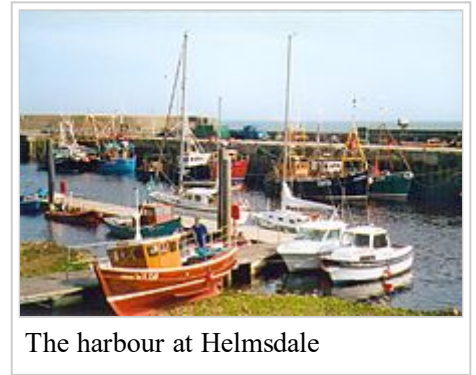
Bus stop at Strathy in 1974

## Community councils, 1975 to present (2007)

Although created under *local government* legislation (the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973) community councils have no statutory powers or responsibilities and are not a tier of local government. They are however the most local tier of statutory representation. Here is a list of Highland Community Councils (scroll to Sutherland).

Under the 1973 act, they were created in terms of community council schemes created by the district councils which were created under the same act. The Sutherland district scheme was adopted in 1975.

Statutory status for community councils was continued under the Local Government etc (Scotland) Act 1994, and the Sutherland scheme is now the responsibility of the Highland Council.



The harbour at Helmsdale

## Constituency

The Sutherland constituency of the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom represented the county from 1708 to 1918. At the same time however the county town of Dornoch was represented as a component of the Northern Burghs constituency.

In 1918 the Sutherland constituency and Dornoch were merged into the then new constituency of Caithness and Sutherland. In 1997 Caithness and Sutherland was merged into Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross.

The Scottish Parliament constituency of Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross was created in 1999 and now has boundaries slightly different from those of the House of Commons constituency. In the Scottish Parliament Sutherland is represented also as part of the Highlands and Islands electoral region.

## Sutherland in popular culture

In M. C. Beaton's Hamish Macbeth mystery series, the fictional towns of Lochdubh and Strathbane are located in Sutherland.

Rosamunde Pilcher's last novel *Winter Solstice* is largely set in and around the fictional Sutherland town of Creagan, located in the Sutherland town of Dornoch.

## Notable people with Sutherland connections

- George Mackay Brown (1921-1996), 'Bard of Orkney', whose mother was born in Strathy
- John Lennon (1940-1980), a frequent visitor to Durness, on which the song 'In My Life' was reputedly based
- Norman MacCaig (1910-1996) Edinburgh born poet, who visited, and wrote about, the region of Assynt, which he visited many times over a period of forty years.
- Patrick Sellar (1780-1851), lawyer and factor.
- W.C. Sellar (1898-1951), humourist who wrote for Punch, best known for the book *1066 and All That*
- William Young Sellar (1825–1890), classical scholar
- Joe Strummer (1952-2002), Frontman of The Clash. Born John Graham Mellor in Ankara, Turkey. His mother, Anna Mackenzie, was a crofter's daughter born and raised in Bonar Bridge.

## See also

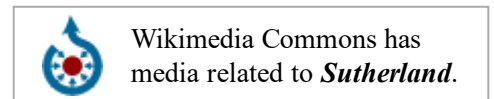
- Subdivisions of Scotland
- Clan Sutherland
- List of counties of Scotland 1890–1975
- Medieval Diocese of Caithness

## Footnotes

1. Macrae, Kenneth (30 September 1971). "Fine roads and sandy beaches". *The Glasgow Herald*. p. 5. Retrieved 3 April 2016.
  2. The Highland Clearances, by John Prebble
  3. [1] (<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7647046783946085652>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20110418021411/http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=7647046783946085652>) April 18, 2011, at the Wayback Machine.
  4. 2001 Census - Geography Classifications (<http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files1/stats/geographies.pdf>)
  5. "Old Roads of Scotland". Old Roads of Scotland. Retrieved 2014-10-01.
  6. <http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/ods-web/standard-outputs.html>
- <sup>^</sup>1 *Sutherland* derives from a Norse perception of the land as 'southern' (*Suðrland* meaning "Southland"). The Norse referred similarly to the Western Isles as *Suðreyjar* (the "Southern Isles"), southern in relation to the "Northern Isles" of Orkney, Shetland and the Faroe Islands.
  - <sup>^</sup>2 Sutherland has two main names in the local, indigenous Scottish Gaelic: *Cataibh* may be used for the whole of Sutherland, but tended historically to apply to the south east, and *Dùthaich MhicAoidh* (Mackay Country) which was used for the north west, sometimes referred to as *Reay Country* in English. *Cataibh* can be read as meaning *among the Cats* and the *Cat* element appears as *Cait* in *Caithness*. The Scottish Gaelic name for Caithness, however, is *Gallaibh*, meaning *among the Strangers* (i.e. the Norse who extensively settled there).

## External links

- Small Area Population Estimates 2004 (<http://www.highland.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/FCA4438E-B5DB-476A-AAF8-1D263436B86B/0/bn>



4sape2004.pdf#search=%22highland%20sutherland%20population%202001%22) PDF (412 KB)  
([www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk))

- Miss Dempster "Folk-Lore of Sutherlandshire" *Folk-Lore Journal*. Volume 6, 1888.

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