

Isle of Skye

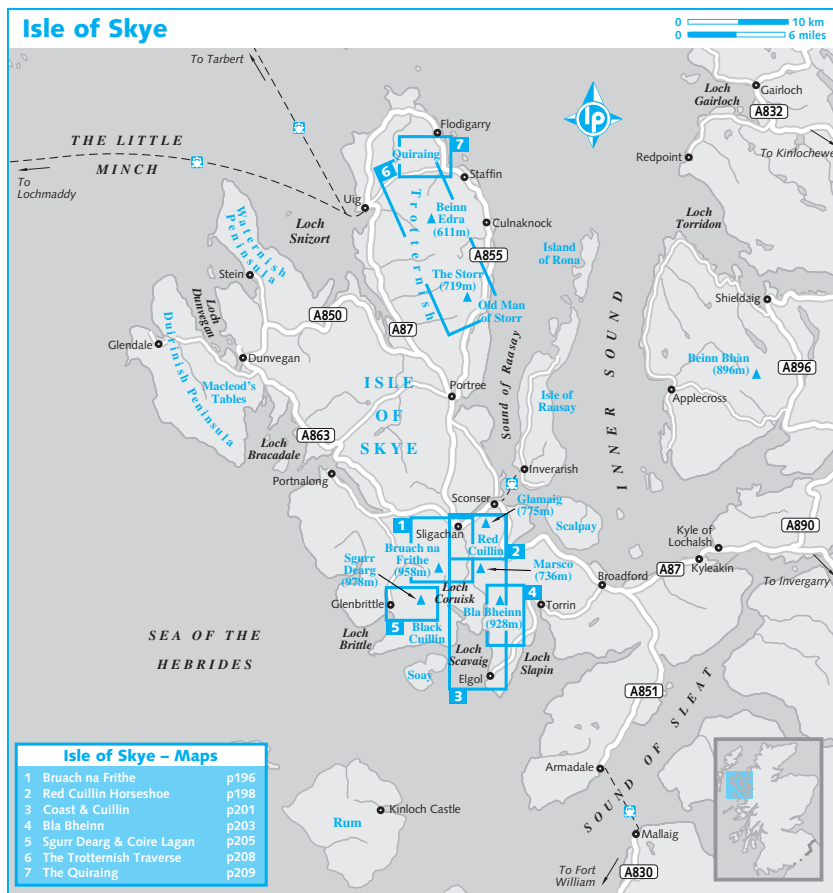
The Isle of Skye is blessed with incontestably the finest scenic splendour and variety in Scotland, assets that have drawn writers, artists and travellers to the island for centuries. Since the early 20th century walkers and climbers have also flocked to Skye to revel in the glorious array of hill and coast walking. All manner of visitors also come in search of the island's mystical atmosphere, little diminished in many quiet corners, at a safe distance from the seemingly unstoppable growth of tourism and construction of new houses.

The Black and Red Cuillins, Skye's trademark among hill folk, are all about adrenalin-drenched challenge and sublime hill and sea vistas, and immensely rewarding for that. They're the subject of the first part of this chapter with two walks, both involving a modest amount of rock scrambling, in the angular Black Cuillin and one in the rounded Red Cuillin. A third Black Cuillin outing, to Sgurr Dearg, and involving a hefty swag of scrambling, is outlined in the boxed text on p204. Proving that height isn't everything, the Coast & Cuillin walk, into the heart of the Black Cuillin, combines superb coast and hill scenery.

North of the Cuillin, beyond the island's capital of Portree, lies the Trotternish peninsula, the centrepiece of which is an undulating, mostly grassy ridge, encrusted with crumbling cliffs and fantastic pinnacles. The walking here is over gentler gradients and on grass. The Quiraing, close to the northern tip of the island, is an extraordinary assemblage of pinnacles, bluffs and secret places.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Venturing into the remote sanctuary of **Loch Coruisk** (p201)
- Finding the way along on the airy ridge of **Bla Bheinn** (p203) in the Black Cuillin
- Savouring the magnificent views far and wide from the **Storr** (p208)
- Romping along the roller-coaster Trotternish ridge on the **Trotternish Traverse** (p207)
- Not getting lost among the weird pinnacles of the **Quiraing** (p209)



INFORMATION

Maps & Books

For a topographic overview of the island the OS Travel – Road 1:250,000 map No 2 *Western Scotland* is ideal.

Skye & the North West Highlands by John Brooks and Neil Wilson covers 15 varied walks on Skye. The Ramblers' Association's *Guide to the Isle of Skye* by Chris Townsend describes 30 walks, ranging from easy strolls to challenging Cuillin scrambles. *Isle of Skye including Raasay* by Paul Williams concentrates on walks at the easier end of the spectrum. *Skye 360, Walking the Coastline of Skye* by Andrew Dempster is a personalised account of a month-long journey with just enough details to follow in his

footsteps. A *Long Walk on the Isle of Skye* by David Paterson, in coffee-table format, offers a description of his walk, inspired by his superb photos.

Guided Walks

Highland Council's countryside rangers (☎ 01471 822905; Old Corry Industrial Estate, Broadford) run varied programs of guided walks, with particular emphasis on Skye's natural heritage, from around March until October. Pick up a printed program from local tourist information centres (TICs).

Cuillin Guides (☎ 01478 640289; www.cuillin-guides.co.uk; Glenbrittle) has years of solid experience behind it, and an unrivalled knowledge of the hills. Its program includes five days of

ridge walking and scrambling with a guide-to-client ratio of 1:5); the staff are qualified mountain leaders.

Hebridean Pathways (☎ 07092 840603; www.hebrideanpathways.co.uk; PO Box 6340, Broadford IV49 9AE) offers a varied program, including six energetic days doing the Cuillin Munros. With a guide-to-client ratio of 1:4 the cost is £350. The principal guide is a member of the Association of Mountaineering Instructors.

Information Sources

VisitScotland's (www.visithighlands.com) comprehensive website is a good place to start, especially for accommodation bookings. For a local take on the island, go to www.isleofskye.net.

For all public transport information contact **Traveline** (☎ 0870 608 2608; www.travelinescotland.com).

GATEWAY

Portree

☎ 01478 / pop 1920

Portree, the largest town on the island and the recognised capital, sprawls along the western shore of a deep inlet on the east coast. It's important to remember that most businesses are closed on Sundays; exceptions are noted.

The **TIC** (☎ 612137; www.visithighlands.com; Bayfield House, Bayfield Rd; ☎ daily Jun-Sep, Mon-Sat Oct-May; ☎) sells maps and books and can answer all your questions about staying on Skye.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

Island Outdoors (☎ 611073; The Green; ☎ daily) stocks gear, maps and books.

MacIntyre's (☎ 612918; 14 Wentworth St; ☎ daily) has the best range of books about Skye and Scotland generally.

For self-catering supplies, there's a large **Co-op supermarket** (Dunvegan Rd; ☎ daily) and a small **Somerfield supermarket** (Bank St; ☎ daily). There is also **Granary Bakery** (Somerset Sq; ☎ Mon-Sat), which is recommended.

SLEEPING & EATING

Although there's a wide and plentiful range of accommodation in and near the town, it's wise to book ahead during summer.

Torvaig Camping & Caravan Site (☎ 611169; Staffin Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 £6/8), about 1 mile north of town on the A855, has few level pitches but is grassed and sheltered.

Bayfield Backpackers (☎ 612231; www.skyehostel.co.uk; Bayfield; dm £13) enjoys a scenic location; some of the dorms have their own bathroom.

The **Pink Guest House** (☎ 612263; www.pinkguesthouse.co.uk; 1 Quay St; s/d £35/60) is a tour de force of interior decoration in almost every imaginable shade of pink, stopping short of the electric variety. It's quiet and particularly comfortable.

Apart from the several hotels in town, all serving their own variations on the bar-meal theme, there are two tempting alternatives.

Prince of India (☎ 612681; Bayfield Rd; mains £9-12; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat), in a large white traditional cottage close to the bay shore, offers a large and varied menu, specialising in Balti dishes.

Café Arriba (☎ 611830; Quay Brae; breakfast £4, mains £7-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) is a cheerful place with chefs who inhabit a different planet from the creators of pub fare, offering a constantly changing menu especially strong on vegetarian dishes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Scottish Citylink (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk) operates bus route 916 from Glasgow via Fort William to Portree (£26, 6¼ hours, three daily), and route 917 from Inverness to Portree (£16, 3½ hours, three daily).

A highly recommended variation from Inverness is to take the outstandingly scenic **First ScotRail** (☎ 0845 755 0033; www.firstscotrail.com) train trip to Kyle of Lochalsh (£17, 2½ hours, four services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and connect with the local **Highland Country Buses** (☎ 01463 710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) service to Portree (£5, one hour, at least four services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday).

By car, follow the A82 from Inverness to Invermoriston then the A887 and A87, across the once-controversial bridge. From the south, the A82 from Glasgow via Fort William lands you at Invergarry, from where you continue on the A87.

THE CUILLIN

The Black and Red Cuillin mountains are rarely out of sight all over southern Skye. Their name Cuillin (pronounced 'coolin') most likely derives from the Norse *kjolen*, meaning 'high rocks'.

The Black Cuillin is the most visually awe-inspiring mountain range in Scotland and, indeed, Britain. The main ridge is 7.5 miles (12.2km) in length and averages about 700m in height, the highest peak being Sgurr Alasdair (993m/3257ft). It's typically spiky, with knife-edged ridges, and is exceptionally challenging – the ultimate test for many walkers. Fortunately there are a couple of routes to seemingly impossible summits that aren't the exclusive domain of rock climbers. All the while, it's salutary to recall that there was a time, not so very long ago as far as the rock itself is concerned, when the Cuillin were considered unassailable (see the boxed text on p197).

The nearby Red Cuillin mountains are completely different, being lower, more rounded and tending to conical profiles. Their red granite, from which they take their name, seems less intimidating and alien than the rough black gabbro of their neighbours. Glamaig (775m/2542ft) reigns supreme.

Basing yourself at Sligachan puts you within striking distance of the summit of Bruach na Frithe, a comparatively easy Black Cuillin peak. Another path from Sligachan leads to the Red Cuillin horseshoe; if the

cloud is down or you fancy a low-level walk, you can walk through to Loch Coruisk and back, as fine a low-level walk as you'd want.

From the shores of Loch Slapin, west of the hamlet of Torrin, you can climb the great gabbro massif of Bla Bheinn (Blaven), a Black Cuillin outlier and a superlative viewpoint from which to view all the Cuillin mountains. Further down the road from Torrin is the hamlet of Elgol, from where you can follow a coastal path to the magnificent Loch Coruisk and on through Glen Sligachan to the main island road at Sligachan itself.

Head down to remote Glenbrittle to take up the challenge of the scramble to the summit of Sgurr Dearg, some of the most airy and exhilarating walking around.

ENVIRONMENT

Millions of years after violent volcanic activity created the Cuillin, Skye was in the grip of a great ice age. Glaciers formed on the highest parts of the island and sculpted the landscape, carving deep basins, now the characteristic corries, in the gabbro rock. The basalt has eroded more readily than the hard gabbro, creating gullies and chimneys, and a finely sculpted, jagged ridge line.

MOUNTAINS FOR SALE?

During the early part of 2000, John MacLeod (chief of the Clan MacLeod) put the Black Cuillin mountains on sale for an asking price of £10 million. Typical of the local reactions reported in the press was the comment of a young lass: 'You cannae sell a mountain'. Environmental and outdoor-interest groups had only just defeated plans for scenic flights to be operated over the same mountains from Sligachan, and were horrified by rumours that wealthy foreigners had expressed interest in purchasing the range. Some feared the Black Cuillin would be turned into a mass-tourism theme park, or that the long history of public access to the mountains would be threatened. The move prompted an even stronger reaction from islanders, who were angered by MacLeod's assumption of title, and a suggestion at a public meeting that the government would buy the estate for the people was booed. Their view was that MacLeod should not profit from the sale and it was unclear whether he actually owned the mountains. MacLeod, on the other hand, stated that he simply needed the money for repairs to the roof of Dunvegan Castle, one of the island's leading tourist attractions.

Later in the year the property was withdrawn from the market pending an investigation by the Crown Estate Commission, which looks after state-owned land, into legal title to the mountains. If the commission found that MacLeod did not own the estate then title would fall to the Crown and, hence, become public property. However, the commission decided not to contest MacLeod's claim to the title and, despite the strength of feeling, MacLeod put the estate back on the market. In July 2001 MacLeod offered to give the Cuillin to the nation in exchange for acceptable arrangements to restore his castle. At the time of research, eight government and private organisations were immersed in an assessment of what needed to be done to the castle. The community at large was to be consulted about how best to handle guardianship of the mountains. As the John Muir Trust says: 'It is likely to be some time' before the whole thing is sorted out.

The most common rock type in the Black Cuillin rock is gabbro, with surface outcrops of smooth basalt. This dark gabbro is a coarse crystalline rock, once described as similar to a nutmeg grater in texture. Being rich in iron, it does strange things to magnetic compasses – you have been warned (see the boxed text, right). The Red Cuillin mountains comprise granite and quartz, with flakes of pink feldspar providing the characteristic red colour.

PLANNING Maps

OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 411 *Cuillin Hills* and Harvey's Superwalker 1:25,000 map *Skye: The Cuillin* cover the hill walks. The latter includes a 1:12,500 enlargement of the Cuillin ridge, offering probably the clearest picture of the complex terrain.

BRUACH NA FRITHE

Duration	6–8 hours
Distance	8.5 miles (13.5km)
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Sligachan (below)
Transport	bus

Summary A superb, energetic outing, with spectacular views of the Black and Red Cuillin and the chance of some exciting scrambling for the cool-headed.

Standing on an apex of the main Black Cuillin ridge, Bruach na Frithe (958m/3142ft) is a superlative viewpoint from which to appreciate the outstanding rock architecture of this amazing range, without getting involved in the serious scrambling most Black Cuillin routes demand. From Sligachan good paths lead right into Fionn Choire, from where a short and steep, but very straightforward, ascent takes you up to the summit. This may be the easiest peak in the Black Cuillin to climb but it still requires considerable effort, involving a total ascent of more than 900m.

NEAREST TOWN Sligachan

☎ 01478

Historic Sligachan is just a large hotel, a bunkhouse, camping ground and a bus stop. It has been the gateway to the Cuillin for more than a century and seethes with activity

WATCH YOUR COMPASS

The magnetic properties of the Black Cuillin gabbro rock distort compass readings, so this small piece of equipment is virtually useless. Thus you are thrown back on your map-reading skills, or GPS bearings and/or route-notes interpretation on cloudy days. If you're a bit uncertain about these skills, then ensure that the weather is fine and settled for your summit attempts. Even then, extreme caution is necessary as the mountain climate is notoriously changeable.

during summer; in fact it's rarely quiet here. You'll search in vain for a shop, so bring all you need from Portree (p193) or Broadford, also the locations of the nearest TTCs.

SLEEPING & EATING

Sligachan Campsite (☎ 650204; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 £8/11), opposite the hotel at the head of Loch Sligachan, enjoys an outstandingly scenic setting.

Sligachan Bunkhouse (☎ 650204; www.sligachan.co.uk; dm £10), on the eastern side of the main road, has that all-important Skye facility – a drying room.

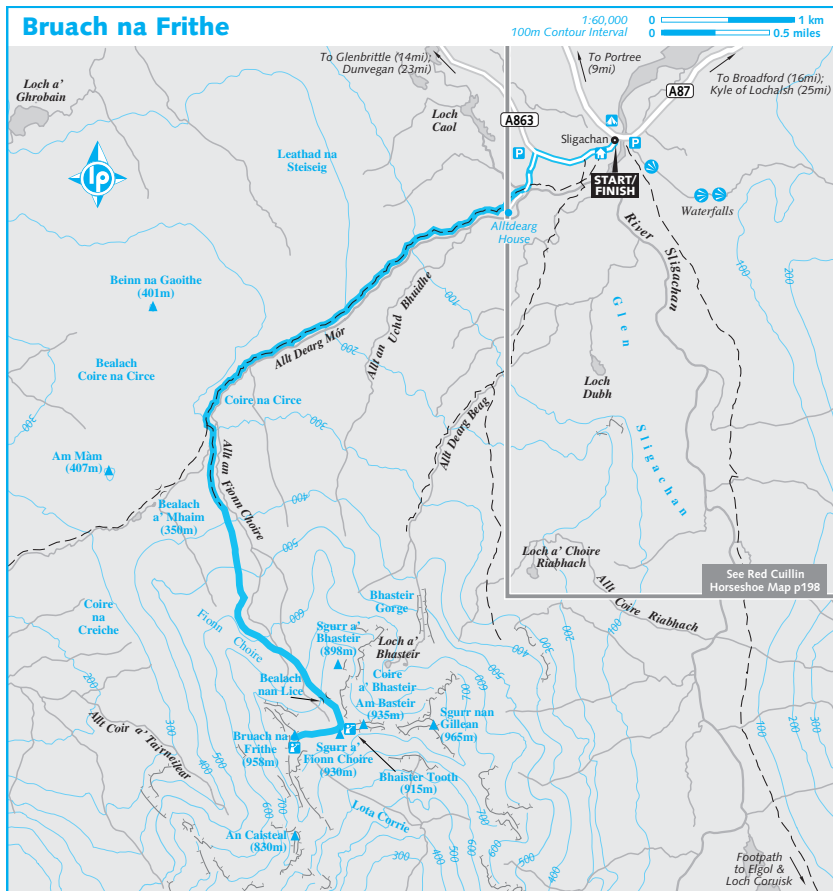
Sligachan Hotel (☎ 650204; www.sligachan.co.uk; s/d £48/96) is a must, if only for a look at the walls of historic photos of early climbers. The comfortable rooms have either mountain or lake views and you can eat in lively **Seamus Bar** (mains £6–12; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) or go upmarket at **Cairidh Seafood Restaurant** (mains £12–18; ☎ lunch & dinner).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Scottish Citylink (☎ 08705 505050; www.citylink.co.uk) bus route 916 from Glasgow, via Fort William, to Portree stops at Sligachan (£26, six hours, three daily), as does route 917 from Inverness (£13, three hours, three daily) to Portree.

A **Highland Country Buses** (☎ 01463 710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) service from Portree (£2, 20 minutes, at least three Monday to Saturday, one Sunday) stops at Sligachan.

By car, Sligachan is 9 miles from Portree and 23 miles from the Skye Bridge. There is a small car park on the south side of the A863 Dunvegan road about 500m west of the hotel, beside a footpath sign pointing to Glenbrittle.



THE WALK

From the roadside car park on the A863, follow the track signed 'Footpath to Glenbrittle', heading towards Alltdearg House. A signed path diverts you around the grounds north of the house, crossing boggy ground. The firmest route keeps close to the fence on the left.

You soon pick up a stony path that runs alongside Allt Dearg Mór, a burn that tumbles down a series of rock ledges, forming some beautiful pools and small waterfalls that invite a swim on a hot day. After 2 miles the path begins to level out in Coire na Circe. Continue on, fording a sizable tributary to reach a large cairn. Here the path for Bruach na Frithe, fainter than the one you've

been on, forks left across boggy ground and crosses another burn, 200m after the cairn. If the weather is clear you will be able to see the summit of Bruach na Frithe and grassy, boulder-strewn slopes running up into Fionn Choire. Follow the ascending path for about 30 minutes, keeping Allt an Fhionn Choire (a burn with small waterfalls pouring from the corrie above) on your left, until you reach a substantial cairn on top of a rock slab. This is a good place for a rest while you decide which route to take to the summit.

Fionn Choire has not been gouged out as deeply as most Scottish corries and does not hold a lochan. Nonetheless, it is a beautiful and impressive place. You should be able to make out a path climbing the steep scree

IT'S ATTITUDE THAT MATTERS

Standing on the summit of Bruach na Frithe or Sgurr Dearg on a good summer's day, it is difficult to imagine that the Black Cuillin were considered to be unattainable as recently as the early 19th century. Between then and now, when people regularly traverse the entire Cuillin ridge, some even making nonstop traverses of the Greater Cuillin (including Bla Bheinn), lies a fundamental shift in attitude. It wasn't modern climbing gear, boots or clothing that made the difference but the development of a different approach to the mountains.

Most of the summits were considered unclimbable until 1835 when Reverend Lesingham Smith and local forester Duncan MacIntyre visited Loch Coruisk and returned to Sligachan by scrambling across the ramparts of the Druiam nam Ramh ridge into Harta Corrie. The following year Professor James Forbes hired MacIntyre as a guide and together they made the first recorded ascent of Sgurr nan Gillean by the now popular (but still tricky) southeast ridge.

With the psychological barrier broken, local men quickly knocked off the other peaks in the Cuillin, with Sheriff Alexander Nicolson claiming the first ascent of Sgurr Alasdair, the highest summit on Skye. Many of these local men became guides to members of the Alpine Club, and John Mackenzie became the first local professional guide on the island. In 1859 an Admiralty surveyor, Captain Wood, mapped the south Cuillin and identified a pinnacle at 986m as being unclimbable, but it only needed that tag to ensure that the first ascent of what is now known as the Inaccessible Pinnacle soon followed. Today it's one of the most popular climbing challenges in the Black Cuillin, involving one pitch of easy rock climbing and a short abseil. Another popular climbing challenge is the Cioch, on the face of Sron na Ciche above Glen Brittle, which was first climbed by Norman Collie (a scientist credited with the first X-ray photograph) and John Mackenzie. The first traverse of the Black Cuillin ridge fell to Shadbolt and Maclaren in 1911, taking nearly 17 hours. It has since been completed in a less than 25% of that time.

on the corrie headwall to reach Bealach nan Lice, just east of the summit. This is the normal route. To your right a grassy shoulder leads up onto the jagged and impressive northwest ridge.

Continuing on the normal route, the path to the base of the headwall is not very distinct but there are a couple of small cairns to look out for as you tend southeast, gently climbing over easy terrain. Cross a small gully and pick up an intermittent path that leads towards the steeper ground, where the path again becomes quite distinct. From here a short, steep climb brings you to the dramatic **Bealach nan Lice**, in the shadow of Am Basteir and Bhasteir Tooth. Turn right and follow a distinct trail around the base of a pinnacle and onto the final, rocky ridge leading to the summit of **Bruach na Frithe**. The peak is marked by a trig point and the view on a clear day is one of the best on Skye. To the west the main section of the Black Cuillin ridge cuts back on itself in a spectacular Z shape, ending in the prominent, thumb-like summit of Gars-bheinn. To the east the fang of rock rising above Am Basteir is Sgurr nan Gillean, and beyond it are the bright scree slopes of the Red Cuillin.

The easiest way back to Sligachan is to reverse the route of ascent. Alternatively you can continue past Am Basteir and drop into Coire a' Bhasteir for a more direct but more difficult descent back to Sligachan.

RED CUILLIN HORSESHOE

Duration	6–7 hours
Distance	7.5 miles (12km)
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Sligachan (p195)
Transport	bus

Summary A tour over the distinctive pink conical peaks, crossing rocky summits and steep, scree-strewn slopes, and giving expansive views of the entire island.

This circuit takes in the main Red Cuillin peaks, including the highest, Sgurr Mhairi (775m), part of the Glamaig massif. Although access is easy, the distance covered is not great and the summits themselves are quite modest in height, the gaps between the hills are far below the summits so, not surprisingly, the walk involves a total ascent of 1207m. The final climb is particularly

demanding, and if you don't fancy climbing 300m of steep, loose scree then maybe this isn't the walk for you: perhaps consider an alternative return from Bealach na Sgaraidh. However, if you do make it to the top you will be rewarded (or confronted) with a 500m-long scree run on the descent, a quick and exhilarating way to end the day.

This route has become the scene of a race, in which the competitors finish the circuit in around 1½ hours. Mere mortals can count on taking a little longer. The meanings of the Gaelic names of the summits are typically descriptive and colourful. Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach and Beinn Dearg Mhór can be translated as 'middle red mountain' and 'big red mountain' respectively. Glamaig itself is of Norse origin and generally regarded as meaning 'gorge mountain', which is less evocative than another interpretation, 'greedy woman', on account of her voluptuous shape perhaps?

THE WALK

Cross the old stone bridge east of Sligachan Hotel and follow the path signed to Loch

Coruisk. After approximately 200m, the gorge of the Allt Daraich comes up on the left. Leave the main path here, go through a gate and follow a path along the fenced southern rim of the ravine. The gorge soon dwindles in height and the path strikes out across open moor towards the shoulder of Sròn a' Bhealain. This section can be boggy but the path can be seen zigzagging encouragingly up drier slopes ahead beyond the fence.

The ascent of the shoulder is initially steep and passing feet have cut high steps into the muddy ground. The gradient eases as you climb higher, until you join the grassy, undulating terrain of the Druim na Ruaige ridge. Several cairns mark the crest of the ridge and there is an excellent perspective over the circuit of peaks ahead. The peak of Sgurr Mhairi, on the Glamaig massif to the north, looks ominously steep.

Leaving the ridge the path enters the stone and scree-covered terrain that dominates the high ground of the circuit. Zigzag up the loose rock to a cairn at the top. The official summit of **Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach**

(651m) is actually a short detour to the southeast, but the views from both cairns are impressive. Flat-topped MacLeod's Tables and the broad Trotternish peninsula lie to the northwest and north, while the peaks of Glen Shiel and Torrison are clearly visible to the east and northeast on the mainland. The dark, barren peaks of the Black Cuillin dominate the scene to the southwest.

Return to the cairn that marked your arrival on the summit ridge and continue north, following a faint path over easy ground to the Bealach Mosgaraidh between Beinn Dearg Mheadhonach and Beinn Dearg Mhór. The path becomes more obvious as it climbs up the other side, over steeper, rocky ground, to reach the summit cairn on **Beinn Dearg Mhór** (731m). Finding the descent from here can be tricky and care is required in poor visibility. Follow the northern spur of the mountain for around 500m to a subsidiary rise marked by a cairn. From this cairn take a few steps backwards (south) and drop steeply down to the northwest. A rough path descends over several worn scree chutes at first, before joining a jumble of larger rocks and boulders towards the bottom of the slope.

The grassy saddle of **Bealach na Sgaraidh** offers a short break from the rock. The route then goes directly up the steep and crag-studded scree slope of Sgurr Mhairi, roughly following the line of a dry burn. The climb is sustained and the rock is often unstable, and it is a relief to reach the grassy summit plateau of **Sgurr Mhairi** (775m). Another excellent panorama presents itself from the large summit cairn, including a bird's-eye view of the Isle of Raasay.

Descend from Sgurr Mhairi in a south-westerly direction, sliding down long scree slopes to the grass below. The best way to descend scree chutes is to dig in your heels to maintain balance over the sliding rocks. Continue until you meet Allt Daraich then turn right to follow a faint path along its northern bank. The burn soon becomes a series of picturesque falls and pools. Cross the stream at one of many fords before you reach the ravine and continue down the opposite bank. You will rejoin the path that you started the day on, and from here it doesn't take long to retrace your steps back to Sligachan Hotel.

COAST & CUILLIN

Duration	2 days
Distance	14 miles (22.5km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start	Elgol (p200)
Finish	Sligachan (p195)
Transport	bus

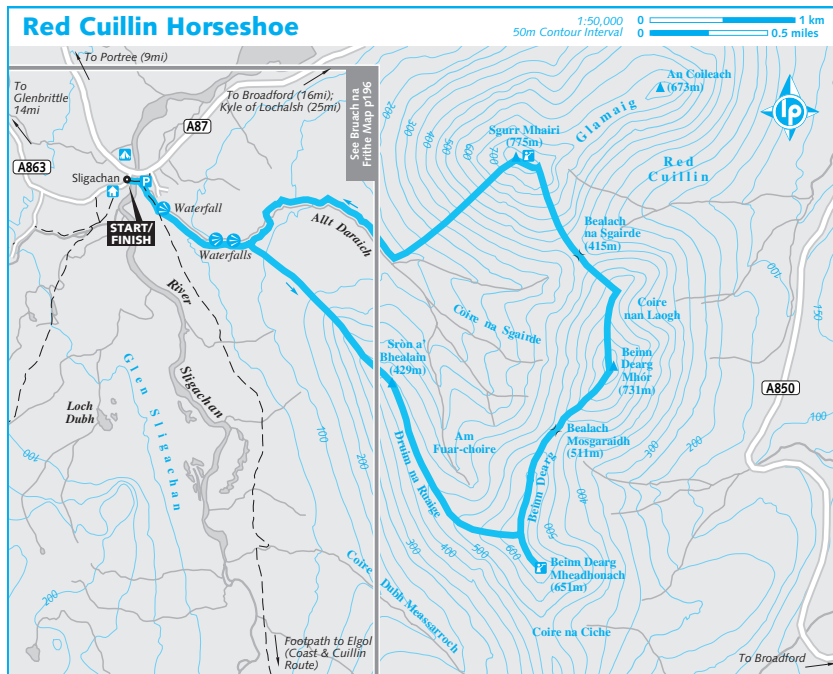
Summary A spectacular coast and glen walk that takes you deep into the heart of the Black Cuillin to Loch Coruisk, via the notorious 'Bad Step'. There's also a superb alternative, out and back from Sligachan.

The combination of magnificent coast walking, from Elgol to the supremely beautiful Loch Coruisk, and dramatic Glen Sligachan make this one of the finest walks on Skye. Loch Coruisk is the jewel in the crown of the Black Cuillin. The jagged arc of peaks rising precipitously from the shore suggests a formidable fortress guarding its beauty. There are only two feasible routes into the loch that don't demand rock-climbing skills; this walk links the two. It can be completed in a single long day (allow seven to nine hours) but by taking two you can immerse yourself in the incomparable scenery. Camping in the wild at Loch Coruisk is an unforgettable experience; don't forget the guidelines for wild camping (p21). There is a bothy at Camasunary, but in a tent at Loch Coruisk you're much closer to the essential spirit of the place.

There's only one problem: about 500m short of Loch Coruisk there's one section of scrambling, along the Bad Step. This is a 6m-long, 60-degree slab with a narrow ledge for the feet and small handholds for support. It is exposed but lurks about 8m above deep water, so is not necessarily dangerous if you can swim well! A cool head is required, especially if you're carrying a bulky, heavy pack.

If prospect of the Bad Step is too daunting, there are two possible alternative ways of reaching Loch Coruisk.

The easier of the two is to go by boat to Loch Coruisk and then walk out. **Bella Jane Boat Trips** (☎ 0800 731 3089; www.bellajane.co.uk; £14) sail from Elgol across Loch Scavaig to the landing steps near Loch Coruisk, a trip of about 45 minutes. Here you can join the path and walk the 8 miles out to



Sligachan, following the Day 2 route. This option would fit easily into a single day and make for a very memorable trip.

Alternatively, walk in and out from Sligachan (see the Alternative Route on p202), but instead of descending to the loch shores, climb the modest hill of Sgurr na Stri (497m), overlooking Loch Coruisk to the southeast for a magnificent view of the Black Cuillin, the loch and various offshore islands.

NEAREST TOWNS

See Sligachan, p195.

Elgol

☎ 01471

This tiny village, dependant on fishing and visitors, sits close to the end of the Strathaird peninsula with an incredible view of the Cuillin across Loch Scavaig.

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation is in short supply here, but it's not far from Torrin (p203), where there are a couple more possibilities.

Rose Croft (☎ 866377; www.isleofskye.net/rosecroft; s/d £30/44) is a long-established and friendly B&B with a beautiful garden and lovely views. A light evening meal (£6) is available by arrangement.

Rowan Cottage (☎ 866287; www.rowancottage-skye.co.uk; 9 Glasnakille by Elgol; s/d £30/60, dinner £20-23) is a traditional cottage with pleasingly furnished rooms a couple of miles along a narrow, winding road east of Elgol.

Coruisk House (☎ 866330; www.seafood-skye.co.uk; s/d £38/76, mains £10-25; ☎ lunch & dinner; 🚗) is a restaurant northeast of Elgol village with rooms in what was originally a small thatched cottage to which travellers were first welcomed a century ago. These days, historic photos adorn the walls, the bedrooms are superbly decorated and the restaurant specialises in locally caught fish and seafood, though without neglecting vegetarians.

Cuillin View Gallery & Coffee Shop (snacks to £3; ☎ lunch), above the harbour, is licensed and offers sandwiches and home baking, and the chance to contemplate the work of local artists, as well as the eponymous view.

The **Post Office Shop** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat) has basic supplies and serves home baking and hot and cold drinks.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Highland Country Buses (☎ 01463 710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) operates a bus service from the Broadford post office to the Elgol post office (£3, 40 minutes, two services Tuesday and Thursday). This is supplemented by the **Royal Mail postbus** (☎ 08457 740740; www.postbus.royalmail.com) service (one hour, two services Monday to Friday, one Saturday). Good connections are available at Broadford to Sligachan (p195) and Portree (p193).

The A881 to Elgol branches from the A850 Kyleakin-Portree road in the small town of Broadford. There's a car park at the bottom of the first steep descent to the harbour and more parking space opposite the nearby village hall.

THE WALK

Day 1: Elgol to Loch Coruisk

4-5 hours, 6 miles (9.5km)

The walk begins about 300m northeast of the Elgol post office along a lane leading north from the A881, and clearly signposted as a footpath to Camasunary and Sligachan. The road soon disappears, leaving a dirt track that ends at two houses. A footpath, signed to Loch Coruisk, continues directly ahead between the fences of the houses. It crosses through a gate and leads out onto open hillside. The views are immediately impressive: the small isles of Soay, Eigg, Rum and Canna lie to the south, while the Black Cuillin dominate the skyline to the northwest.

The well-trodden path basically contours across grass and heather slopes all the way to the beach at Camasunary, with ever-improving views. The drop-off to the west is steep in places as the lower slopes of Ben Cleat and Beinn Leacach are passed, and care is required over these sections. At Glen Scaladal a stile is crossed before descending to a pebbly cove. A steep climb from the back of the beach leads to the broken cliff top. Duck under the branches of a grove of stunted trees, and soon follow a track that skirts a drop by climbing slightly higher up the cliff. Easier ground then leads down to the bridge over the Abhainn nan Leac and a substantial junction of paths, about 3 miles from Elgol.

Of the two buildings at Camasunary, the larger house by the bridge is private. The smaller building, 500m west, is a bothy which is maintained by the **Mountain Bothies**

Association (www.mountainbothies.org.uk), providing free accommodation for hillwalkers. At the junction of paths, the 4WD track descending from the shoulder to the east leads to Kirkibost, 1.5 miles away. The path that forks right, between the bridge and house, leads directly up the glen to Sligachan, avoiding Loch Coruisk.

To continue to Loch Coruisk take the path leading west along the top of the beach, passing in front of the bothy. Ford the Abhainn Camas Fhionnairigh by following its banks upstream for 100m or so and then cross on stepping stones. The path on the other side soon climbs slightly to contour around the craggy lower slopes of Sgurr na Stri. The terrain is rougher than previously, and you cross several rock steps and angled slabs. As you round the headland another wonderful vista opens up – rocky islands nestle in the azure water at the mouth of the Scaivaig River, backed by the looming Cuillin.

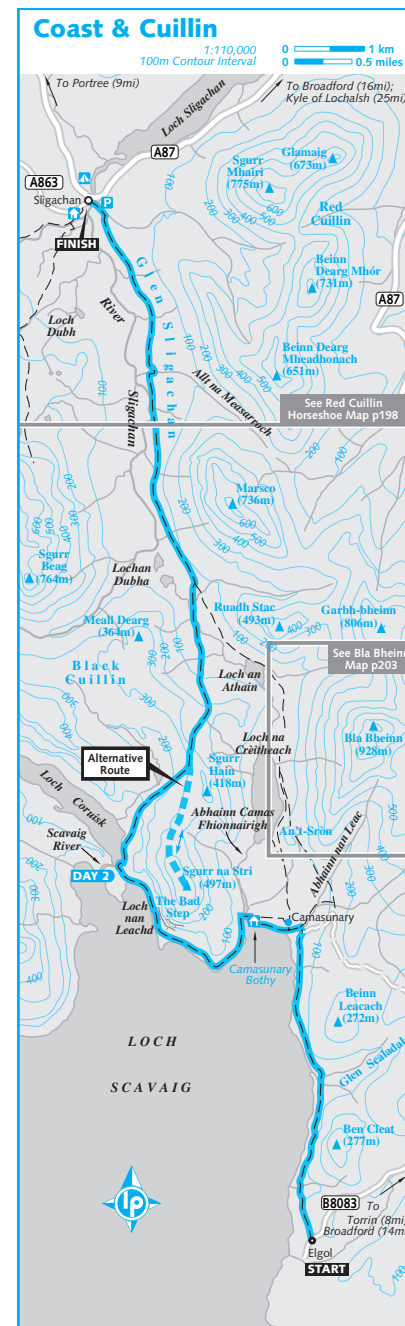
The slabs become more frequent as the path veers north and care must be taken not to lose the main trail as it splits in various places. Continue towards the white sand and turquoise water of Loch nan Leachd cove. The notorious Bad Step is the very last slab that needs to be negotiated before the beach. A cairn marks the stony path that descends to the difficulties. It could be a good idea to undo pack straps if you are worried, just in case of a slip into the water below. Duck under an overhang and scramble out onto the seaward rock face. Pull yourself up to balance on a ledge that skirts around the slab, using handholds for support. Shuffle along, taking care to drop diagonally down to the boulders at the beach rather than continuing up the slab at a convergence of fault lines.

Cross the boulders to the sand of Loch nan Leachd beach, and follow the path inland across the low saddle at the back of the cove. **Loch Coruisk** is suddenly revealed in all its glory and its banks make a fine rest spot. If you are spending the night here, flat ground for camping can be found just over the stepping stones that cross the Scaivaig River.

Day 2: Loch Coruisk to Sligachan

3-4 hours, 8 miles (13km)

The path from Loch Coruisk to Sligachan leads around the southeastern shore of the



SKYE IN TRUST

A good deal of south Skye and the Cuillin is owned and managed by the John Muir Trust (p31), a conservation body that owns and manages several other areas on the Scottish mainland. The Trust's three separate but contiguous estates total around 30,000 acres of mountainous and rural Skye. They include several small and active crofting communities, which are directly involved in managing the estate, and a wealth of archaeological sites and plant and animal species.

The first purchase, the Torrinn Estate, was made in 1991. Three years later, the much larger and adjacent Strathaird Estate was purchased, ensuring the preservation of land extending into the heart of the Cuillin, plus Glen Sligachan, Loch Coruisk and the peaks of Bla Bheinn, Marsco and Ruadh Stac. The later addition of the Sconser Estate brought more summits in the Red Cuillin under the Trust's control.

It could be said that the glaring gap in the Trust's Isle of Skye portfolio is the Black Cuillin themselves, the current and future ownership of which is the subject of a drawn-out and highly controversial debate (see the boxed text on p194).

loch and climbs up the right-hand side of the burn that can be seen tumbling down from a smaller loch above. It is a climb of over 300m to the saddle itself and the terrain is rocky towards the top. A large cairn marks the saddle and there are fine views out to the west, over the serrated north Cuillin ridge. Veer northwest along the ridge to a second cairn 20m away, where a wide and stony trail drops down the other side. The path from Camasunary to Sligachan can be seen winding along the valley below. The descent to join up with it is fairly steep for a section, and then evens out – becoming rather wet at the valley floor. Join the main Sligachan path at a large cairn, from where there is a great perspective of Bla Bheinn and the Clach Glas ridge to the southeast.

From the junction of paths it is about 3.5 miles along the valley to Sligachan. The terrain is largely flat and the going is easy. Although the Sligachan Hotel soon comes into view, it can seem like a long time before it moves much closer. The final 500m of the route is along a well-benched path and you exit the mountains at a metal stile. Turn left across the old bridge to arrive at the hotel.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: SLIGACHAN TO SGURR NA STRI

7½ hours, 15 miles (24.2km)

Follow the path signposted to Loch Coruisk immediately east of the old Sligachan bridge. A generally good path wanders up Glen Sligachan, which is dominated by the Red Cuillin peaks on the one hand and

Sgurr nan Gillean and its Black Cuillin satellites on the other. The path becomes rockier and wetter as it gradually rises towards the watershed, past the imposing crags on Marsco's precipitous flanks. Bla Bheinn comes into view and soon you cross the watershed (1¼ hours from the start) and start to descend. Shortly, at a fork marked by a large, sprawling cairn, bear right and go down to cross Allt nam Fraoch on stepping stones. The rough path climbs steadily, through a steep, eroded stretch, to easier going, then on to the ridge crest, from where a sliver of Loch Coruisk can be seen (one hour from the watershed).

Swing left (south); a line of cairns marks the steep descent to the loch's shores. However, continue generally south across the steep, grassy slope, which is strewn with boulders, across three gullies, trending generally downhill. At the top of a short ascent from the third gully (about 30 minutes from the ridge crest), with more of Loch Coruisk visible, leave the path. Head south then southeast, along intermittent paths, up shallow, damp gullies and across huge, rough, dark slabs. Edge west towards the precipitous drop to the loch's outlet and continue up to a large cairn on the summit of **Sgurr na Stri** (1¼ hours from the ridge crest). The superb view here takes in Elgol, Camasunary, three of the four Small Isles, the Old Man of Storr and the Trotternish ridge, and the incomparable Loch Coruisk.

Retrace your steps to Sligachan (3½ hours from the summit). Standing slightly aloof from the central

BLA BHEINN

Duration	5½–5¾ hours
Distance	5.2 miles (8.4km)
Difficulty	moderate–demanding
Start/Finish	Allt na Dunaiche car park
Nearest Towns	Torrin (right), Elgol (p200)
Transport	bus
Summary	Plenty of steep uphill work past a hidden chasm and two secluded lochans to exceptional views from the summit of a Black Cuillin outlier.

Black Cuillin ridge, and rising impressively from the northwestern shores of Loch Slapin, Bla Bheinn (928m/3045ft), or Blaven as it is often Anglicised, looks pretty daunting. With sheets of steep scree, two massive buttresses of black, fissured gabbro split by a deep gully, and looking precipitous from every angle, it seems to be strictly for rock climbers. However, a well-made path leading generally west from the Elgol road, and built by the John Muir Trust – the peak stands on the Trust's Strathaird Estate (see the boxed text, opposite) – takes you up into hidden Coire Uaigneich. From here, if you don't mind skittering about on steep scree slopes, the ascent is fairly straightforward, at least to the southern summit (924m). The main top, 4m higher, is only a short distance away, but reached on an exposed scramble.

This is definitely not a place to be in poor

weather, and a compass is virtually useless (see the boxed text on p195). The only reliable method of route-finding is your own observation, so make sure to check the weather forecast before setting out.

NEAREST TOWNS

See Elgol, p200.

Torrin

☎ 01471

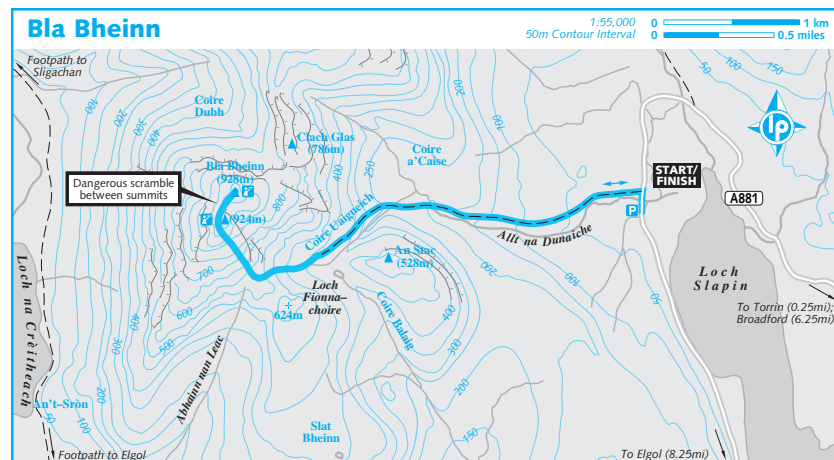
This small settlement at the head of Loch Slapin has retreated from the edge of extinction since the John Muir Trust purchased the land it occupies. It has only a couple of B&Bs, with the nearest hostel being in Broadford, 7 miles to the east, where you'll also find shops, restaurants and an ATM.

Fearnoch (☎ 822717; www.fearnoch-skye.com; ½ of 16 Torrinn; s/d £40/70) is a modern cottage with superb views. Evening meals are available by arrangement.

Slapin View (☎ 822672; d £19) is a renovated croft (farm) house. The owner will cook an evening meal if requested when booking.

Blue Shed Coffee Shop (☎ 822000; snacks £3; ☎ 10am–5pm) is a well-dressed shed beside the main road at the western end of the village. Art prints adorn the walls and it's a popular drop-in place with the locals.

Torrin is on the A881, 7 miles west of Broadford; the Broadford–Elgol bus stops here (£2, 10 minutes, two services Tuesday and Thursday).



CLASSIC WALK – SGURR DEARG & COIRE LAGAN

This challenging, exhilarating ascent of Sgurr Dearg (978m/3208ft) on the main Black Cuillin ridge involves some scrambling and a descent to one of the most impressive corries in Scotland. It provides a taster of Cuillin 'walking' and is less technical than other routes on the main ridge. It takes in the summit of Sgurr Dearg, scuttles around the base of the Inaccessible Pinnacle then descends an exhilarating scree chute into Coire Lagan. Allow 5½ to 6½ hours for the 5-mile (8km) demanding walk, which has 990m of ascent.

The walk begins in Glenbrittle, where accommodation is available at either **Glenbrittle SYHA Hostel** (☎ 01478 640278; www.syha.org.uk; dm £13) or **Glenbrittle Campsite** (☎ 01478 521206; unpowered sites for 2 £9); the small shop stocks basic supplies, stove fuel, maps and books.

Highland Country Buses (☎ 01463 710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) and M Macdonald operate a bus service from Portree to Glenbrittle via Sligachan (55 minutes, two return services daily) between 15 May and 30 September. By car, turn off the A863 5 miles west of Sligachan along B8009; 2 miles along, turn off for Glenbrittle, which is 7 miles ahead.

Begin the walk across the road from Glen Brittle Hut (private), just north of the village. Follow a signposted path and then cross a footbridge over Allt Coire na Banachdich. A clear path climbs gently over the bog to a lookout above Eas Mor waterfall. Continue heading southeast up the main path, passing under the western spur of Sgurr Dearg. At any stage here you need to leave the path and strike out towards the spur, across rough and sometimes wet ground. The gradient soon steepens and the terrain becomes rockier as you gain the spur. Paths zigzag around outcrops as far as a short and steep section. Either bypass this on the left (north) or complete the easy scramble up a prominent gully to emerge on a flat and partially grassy shoulder (around one hour from the start).

The ascent continues steadily along a broad ridge to another short, steep section. A little easy scrambling puts you on top and within sight of the summit of Sgurr Dearg. Between you and the summit, however, is a knife-edge ridge, the crux of this route. The scrambling across it is straightforward but the exposure is considerable. There's an easier alternative just to the right (south) side of the ridge crest. Once past this, a short climb leads to the sharp summit of **Sgurr Dearg** (two hours from the partially grassy shoulder).

Even sharper than the summit of Sgurr Dearg is the adjacent Inaccessible Pinnacle (986m), a great fin of rock usually called the 'In Pin', which can only be reached by a rock climb. Further

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The car park is on the western side of the A881, 2 miles from Torrin, just past the bridge over Allt na Dunaiche.

The occasional bus services between Broadford and Elgol (see p200) will let you off at the car park.

THE WALK

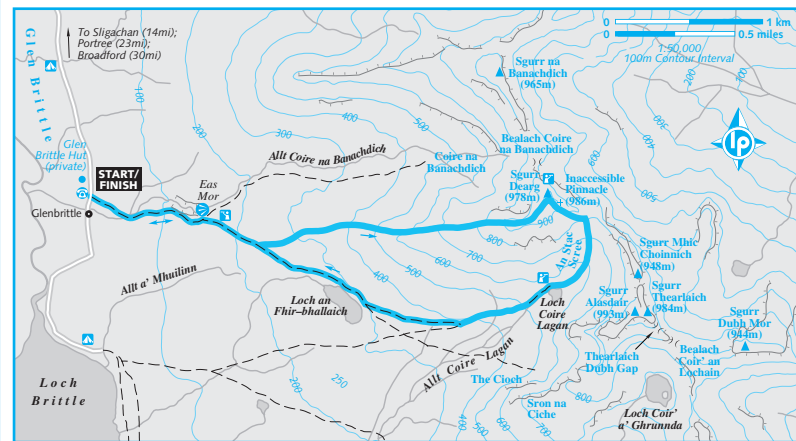
Follow a path from the north side of the car park down, through a gate and on to the road. Cross the bridge and turn immediately left along a wide path. Negotiate a small burn on stepping stones, and start gaining height past a youthful birch wood above tumbling Allt na Dunaiche. Soon you go through a gate, then another and out into open moorland, where the ascent starts in earnest. The path carries you up, over the lip of the first hanging valley beside an attractive waterfall, closing fast on Bla

Bheinn's huge black bluffs, leaning woosily to the north. The path leads on, up beside the burn, which you cross on slightly awkward stepping stones and the inner sanctum of **Coire Uaigneich** comes into view. Cross the stream draining its slopes and ascend the braided, stony path, which becomes more single-minded as the ground steepens. A secluded grassy bowl comes as a pleasant break from all the rock and steepness, with **Loch Fionna-choire** on a shelf nearby to the east (one to 1¼ hours from the start).

Cross the confluence of two burns then head west, hopping across two larger burns and landing beside a huge isolated boulder (a useful landmark on the way back). There's no choice but uphill, soon across grass for a short distance. An amorphous cairn marks the start of the route up the very steep scree slope at the head of the corrie, to the main south ridge of Bla Bheinn (30 minutes from

afield the stunning view takes in the northern Cuillin ridge, and Sgurr Alasdair and Sgurr Mhic Choinnich across Coire Lagan to the south.

Take great care to find the correct route down into Coire Lagan. Descend a prominent ramp running down to the right (south) of the In Pin, dropping down from the main ridge beneath the cliffs of An Stac. Be careful on the slabs, where loose gravel and stone act like ball bearings underfoot. Go round a corner to the left, pass beneath the cliffs, and contour for a short distance to the top of An Stac Scree plunging down from Bealach Coire Lagan. You should be able to see a clean run down to Loch Coire Lagan, but if the cloud is down and you can't see the bottom, go cautiously. **Coire Lagan** is very impressive, its cliffs falling more than 300m directly from the summit of Sgurr Alasdair. A well-defined path descends steeply from the rim of Coire Lagan. After a few hundred metres turn right at a fork marked by a small cairn and follow the smaller path (rough and boggy in places) back to the start (one to 1½ hours from Coire Lagan).



near Loch Fionna-choire), where there's a small pond and even some grass.

The path onwards is faint at first, following the crest briefly then swinging to the western flank and becoming clearer, snaking through lines of small cliffs, mostly on scree. Pause to contemplate the fine view straight down to the beach and lonely white cottage at Camasunary. It's a surprisingly straightforward, though steep, route on scree and broken rock but take care to keep to the main, fairly well-worn line to avoid any chance of finding yourself in an awkward situation. After a while the ridge broadens and the route angles up across the slope to a cairn on the edge of a small plateau, from where it's a short distance to another cairn on the south summit (one hour after reaching the south ridge). The views from here extend to Knoydart and even as far as Ben Nevis on a good day.

Not far to the northeast, a cairn and trig point mark the slightly higher main summit of Bla Bheinn, but reaching it is not straightforward. Continue along the spine of the ridge, descend steeply into a notch, then go up to the right across exposed, sloping ledges and on to the main summit of **Bla Bheinn** (928m), 15 minutes from the south summit. The views north across Garbh-bheinn and the Red Cuillin are stunning.

Retrace your steps, over the south summit then down, aiming for the prominent lochan on the bealach. Take great care to steer well clear of a deep, precipitous gully on your left, down to the pond. Once you've crossed the burn, the Torridon and Knoydart peaks come into view, and much further down a small, narrow canyon on Allt na Dunaiche is right beside the path, much more obviously than on the way up. Continue down to the car park.

TROTTERNISH

The Trotternish – a 25km-long sinuous, precipitous escarpment snaking across the middle of the peninsula – dominates the northern end of Skye beyond Portree. It rises abruptly from the narrow coastal fringe in the east while in the west the indented slopes are longer and less steep. The peaks are not as high or dramatic as the Cuillin, but an unusual sequence of geological happenings has created the escarpments, pinnacles and landslides that make the Trotternish so distinctive. Towards the southern end stands the Old Man of Storr, the instantly recognisable tapering pinnacle set apart from the rugged cliffs. Almost at the northern end of the ridge is the Quiraing, a fascinating maze of weird and wonderful rock sculptures. The ridge tops are generally grassy and make for easy walking, compared with much of the rest of the island.

The three walks described in this section are generally less demanding than those in the Cuillin but they should still be treated with respect and may present navigational difficulties in mist.

ENVIRONMENT

Around 150 million years ago Trotternish was a coastal lagoon colonised by sea reptiles and dinosaurs – footprints have been found on the east of the peninsula and fossils can be seen in abundance along the shore. Then the whole peninsula was covered with lava, up to 1300m deep, from huge volcanic eruptions further south on the island. The massive weight of basalt convulsed the softer, more pliable sedimentary rocks, causing them to crack and slip. The Trotternish ridge and its chaotic crags are the result of this huge landslide, and the geological upheaval continues to this day. It is under such conditions that pinnacles of rock have sheered off from the main cliff face and been squeezed and eroded into positions that seem to defy natural laws. The 2300m-long landslide that runs from the scarp on Meall na Suiramaich, the peak above the Quiraing, down to Staffin Bay is the largest single slip in the British Isles. It is generally stable, though the road at Flodigarry still shifts occasionally.

PLANNING Maps

The OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 408 *Trotternish & The Storr* covers all walks on the Trotternish peninsula.

ACCESS TOWNS

Staffin

☎ 01470

The white-painted houses of the several hamlets that belong to Staffin are spread out on either side of the main road just inland from Staffin Bay. The nearest bank or ATM is in Portree.

SLEEPING & EATING

Staffin Caravan & Camping Site (☎ 562213; unpowered/power sites for 2 £7/13), at the southern end of the village, has sheltered sites in a quiet location.

Gairloch View (☎ 562718; www.gairlochview.co.uk; 3 Digg, Staffin; s/d £24/48) is a modern bungalow about 1 mile north of the Quiraing road junction with fantastic sea views.

Glenview Hotel (☎ 562248; www.glenviewsskye.co.uk; s/d £45/90, dinner £25) is about 4 miles south of Staffin, in the settlement of Culnacknock, and is a homely, very friendly place, with comfortable rooms. Dinner, prepared by the accomplished chef, is a set menu of two or three courses.

Columba 1400 (☎ 611400; mains to £5; ☺ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat; 📶) is a large, comparatively new but sympathetically designed community centre in which you'll find an excellent café with superb views, serving great-value snacks and light meals.

Staffin Bay Stores (☺ Mon-Sat) and the smaller **Village Shop** (Stenscholl; ☺ Mon-Sat), about 1.5 miles further north, stock basic supplies.

Hidden Treasures and the adjacent **Pieces of Ate** (☎ 562787; lunch mains £4, dinner £8; ☺ lunch Easter-Sep, dinner Mon-Sat Jul-Aug, Fri & Sat Sep-Jun), at the junction of the A855 and the Quiraing road, are definitely worth a stop. The former is a licensed deli, while the latter is a takeaway sandwich bar that also does takeaway evening meals.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Highland Country Buses (☎ 01463 710555; www.rapsons.co.uk) operates service 57 between Portree and Uig (on the west coast) via Staffin (£3, 33 minutes) and Flodigarry (£4, 45 minutes). There are eight services Monday to Satur-

day. The Flodigarry Taxi Bus, operated by **Uig Taxis** (☎ 01470 542342), connects with Scottish Citylink's evening arrivals from Inverness and Glasgow – see p193 for details.

Flodigarry

☎ 01470

A tranquil hamlet strung along the coast in the far northeastern corner of the peninsula, Flodigarry's claim to fame is as the birthplace of Flora MacDonald, who lived here between 1751 and 1759. She helped Bonnie Prince Charlie (the Young Pretender) to escape from the mainland to Skye after his defeat at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. Her cottage is now part of the hotel. The nearest bank and ATM is in Portree. For transport details see opposite.

SLEEPING & EATING

Dun Flodigarry Hostel (☎ 552212; hostel.flodigarry@btpopenworld.com; unpowered sites for 2 £5, dm/tw £11/26; 📶) is a large building in a beautiful position overlooking Staffin Bay. The friendly staff can help with advice about walking in the Quiraing and around the coast.

Flodigarry Country House Hotel (☎ 552203; www.flodigarry.co.uk; s/d £55/80, with dinner £85/106), an award-winning small hotel with large, view-oriented rooms and superb Scottish-style cuisine, is a great place for a special celebration.

THE TROTTERNISH TRAVERSE

Duration	7–8 hours
Distance	14 miles (22.5km)
Difficulty	demanding
Start	Storr Woodlands car park
Finish	Quiraing road car park
Nearest Towns	Staffin (opposite), Flodigarry (above)
Transport	bus

Summary A superb crossing of the long, undulating central ridge of the Trotternish, with lots of ups and downs, rewarded by plenty of first-class views.

The crumbling black cliffs and the extraordinary pinnacles and bluffs of the Storr (from the Norse *staur*, meaning 'stake') are one of the most popular places on the island. The tapering, nearly pointed Old Man of Storr, all 50m of him, is a landmark

WARNING

Massive rock falls, once a rarity, have become more frequent in the area around the Old Man of Storr. Warnings signs have been posted advising visitors not to go beyond the edge of the forest. The route described here does not seem to go perilously close to the danger zone. Nevertheless, take the greatest care in the area, especially after heavy rain.

for miles around. Unnervingly, he seems to be leaning rather drunkenly seawards and will probably topple completely one day as the friable rock at his base gradually erodes away. The Storr (719m/2358ft) is the highest point on the Trotternish peninsula, and from here this classic ridge walk crosses the greater, and best, part of the peninsula. From the Storr you gradually lose height as you progress north, crossing several summits. At the end, you'll have polished off about 1450m of ascent. Paths, such as there are, have been made by the ubiquitous sheep, and walkers.

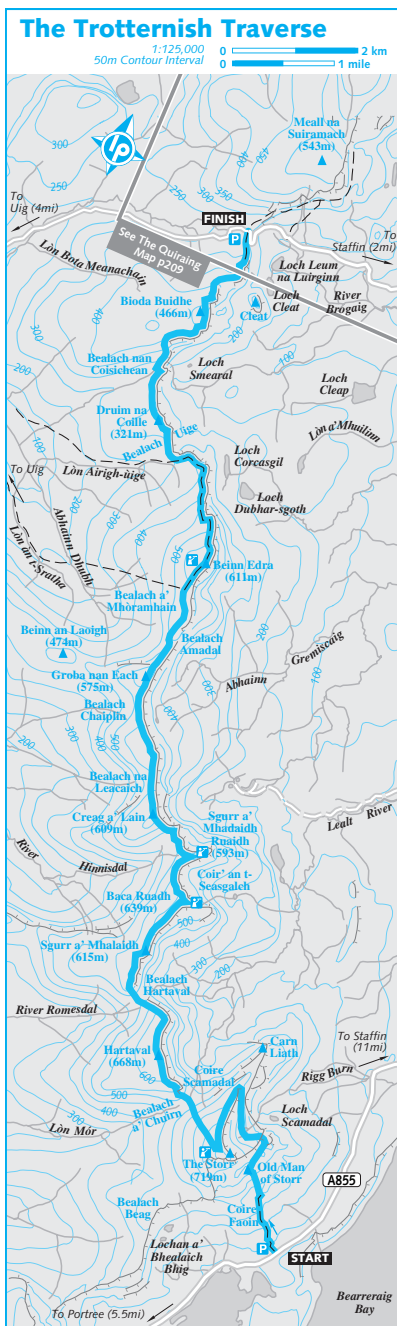
Alternatives If time is short, or the transport arrangements for the full walk are too complicated, there's no shame in just walking up to the Storr and back. Allow 4½ to five hours for the 5.5-mile (9km) walk.

Two paths leading generally west from the ridge provide alternative routes off the ridge to the village of Uig on the west coast. You can descend from Bealach a' Mhòramhain via Glen Uig or from Bealach Uige via Glen Conon. Either gives a similar distance to the main walk but less ascent, and the advantage of finishing on a bus route (see opposite).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts from the signposted Storr Woodlands car park, beside the A855, 6.5 miles north of Portree. Highland Country Buses service 57 (see opposite) will stop here on request; the car park is about 15 minutes from Portree.

The route ends at a parking area on the crest of the steep, narrow Quiraing road, 1.1 miles west of its junction with the A855 at Brogaig, which is about 1 mile northwest of Staffin. Highland Country Buses service 57 also passes through Brogaig.



THE WALK

From the car park follow the wide, well-constructed path up through the conifer plantation, steadily gaining height. At the forest edge the Old Man comes into view, standing aloof from the main ramparts beyond. Go through a gate (15 minutes from the start) and continue up across open grassland to a path junction. Turn right (north) here (the clearer path to the left goes up almost to the foot of the Old Man). Continue up the grassy slopes to the right of the Old Man, gradually gaining the classic perspective of the pinnacle from a position slightly above and to the north of him. Follow the path, crossing a fence on a rocky spur, and continue around to the west where a short, steep climb leads to the grassy bowl beneath the northern cliffs of the Storr. The path becomes fainter as it skirts the bowl and climbs onto the broad skyline ridge, where the views of Trotternish really begin to open out. From here a 20-minute climb south should see you on the summit of the **Storr** (719m).

The panoramic views embrace most of Skye. The long line of cliffs of the Trotternish ridge stretches north to the Quiraing, and the jagged profile of the Cuillin is unmistakable to the south. To the east, across the waters of the Minch, the mainland mountain ranges of Torridon, Applecross, Glen Shiel and Knoydart are spread out across the horizon. More immediately, there is a dizzying view across the cliff edge to the Old Man of Storr and the pinnacles of Coire Faoin 300m below.

From the cairn, descend northwest down the steep slope to Bealach a' Chuirn. Then it's up the broad grassy back of **Hartaval** (668m), with rather craggy ground higher up on the rock-strewn summit.

Descend close to the cliff edge to Bealach Hartaval. A short, steep climb leads back up onto the ridge. Go up the right side of a sheep pen and scramble up a short gully to the top. The terrain is less bumpy now, even though you cross **Sgurr a' Mhalaidh** and **Baca Ruadh**. **Sgurr a' Mhadaidh Ruaidh**, an impressive tongue of cliff, juts out from the ridge to the east; it is possible to walk to its very end for views back along the main cliffs.

The ridge now veers to the west and a descent, a climb and then another descent

lands you in Bealach na Leacach, where there's an old stone wall and a wire fence. Cross the fence by a stile about 100m to the west and continue over three more tops and down to **Bealach a' Mhoramhain** (the start of one of the two alternative routes to Uig) at the foot of the ascent to **Beinn Edra** (611m).

The next 2.5 miles or so, north from Beinn Edra, are tougher going, over heathery, boggy ground. Keep close to the cliff edge for the easiest passage. It's a long descent from Beinn Edra to **Bealach Uige** (and the second possible route west down to Uig). Less than 1 mile further on, you have to find a way through thick tussock grass on the seriously steep pull up to the summit plateau of **Bioda Buidhe** (466m), but console yourself with the thought that this is the last climb of the day. The Quiraing road soon comes into view over the other side, beyond which the pinnacles of the Quiraing can be clearly seen. Veer away from the cliff edge to avoid a crag on the descent then return to the ridge to join a clear path that will guide

THE QUIRAING

Duration	2½–2¾ hours
Distance	3.5 miles (5.6km)
Difficulty	moderate
Start/Finish	Quiraing road car park
Nearest Towns	Staffin (p206), Flodigarry (p207)
Transport	private
Summary	Explore the weird and wonderful pinnacles, crags and bluffs at the northern end of the Trotternish ridge.

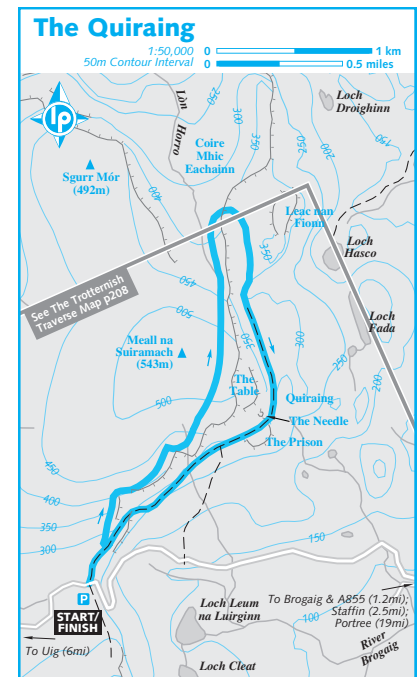
you down to the car park beside the road. The pinnacles, cliffs and landslides of the Quiraing (pronounced 'kweer-yng' and meaning 'pillared enclosure') are a compact and easily explored example of the features that make the Trotternish peninsula unique. Generally easy paths give access to the summit of Meall na Suiramach (543m/1781ft) with fine views of islands, the mainland and to the base of the towering escarpment.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The walk starts at a car park on the Quiraing road, 1.8 miles west of its junction with the A855 at Brogaig, which is about 1 mile northwest of Staffin.

THE WALK

Set out along the well-worn path, signposted to Flodigarry. Follow it for a few hundred metres to the first burn crossing then strike up north and northeast across country to a grassed stone wall. Follow this northeast for a few hundred metres until it disappears then zigzag up the steep slope to find a clear path leading northeast across the hillside. Wet in places, it leads into a wide, shallow and grassy glen; go through a gate in the fence there (35 minutes from the start). Continue northeast up the slope. About 10 minutes further on, the path swings north to parallel the cliff edge. From the nearby rim there's a fantastic view down into the heart of the Quiraing and a row of flat-topped rock outcrops between the cliff and a row of massive bluffs. Continue past a cairn (the summit of Meall na Suiramach is further west) with fine views of the many offshore islets and the Western Isles. Keeping close to the edge, start to descend (15 minutes from the gate) and you'll soon reach a large cairn. A clear path descends north near the



SHORT WALKS**Waternish peninsula**

Follow a clear track across the northern end of the remote Waternish peninsula, past two Iron Age brochs to Unish house, the oldest residential building still standing on Skye. Allow 2¾ hours for this 5.6-mile (9km) easy walk. It starts and finishes at Trumpan church car park; turn off the A850 Portree–Dunvegan road 19 miles from Portree along the B886. Turn right at a T-junction and continue along a minor road to the car park. Take OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 408.

From the car park, follow the road northeast for 600m to a right-angle bend. Turn left (north-west) along the vehicle track, going through a gate. The track can be muddy in places after wet weather. About 1.2 miles along, a commemorative cairn on the left is a good vantage point for a view of Dun Borrafiach on the hillside to the northeast. It looks like an untidy heap of stones but is worth the diversion; it's an Iron Age broch, built about 1500 years ago. Approximately 800m further on you'll find another broch, perched on a small hilltop. An hour from the start, Unish house comes into view. Go through two gateways and down to the building. Built during the 17th century, it was occupied for around 200 years. The long crack in the eastern wall is locally reputed to have been caused by a lightning strike. The remains of several smaller stone buildings nearby suggest that a substantial community once lived here. Retrace your steps to the start.

Stein is the only settlement that really resembles a village found on the Waternish peninsula. At the T-junction (mentioned in the first paragraph) turn left – about 400m on is the **Stein Inn** (☎ 01470 592362; www.steinn.co.uk; s/d £35/54, mains £9-14; 🍷 lunch & dinner), the oldest inn on Skye and highly recommended. It has real ales on tap and does hearty bar meals, specialising in locally caught fish.

Coral Beaches

Explore one of Skye's gems – beaches of white, crunchy, crushed-shell sand with beautiful coastal views. Allow two hours for this 5-mile (8km) easy walk. It starts and finishes at the Coral Beaches car park – from Portree follow the A850 to Dunvegan on the west coast. Continue on to Dunvegan Castle then continue on a single-track road to the hamlet of Claigan and the car park. Take OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 408.

edge of the outer cliff line, down to a small saddle and a break in the cliffs.

Climb a stile and go down a sunken path to start the passage of the Quiraing, with towering black cliffs on the one hand and a jumble of crags and pinnacles on the other. Cross a stone wall and suddenly there's nothing but space on your left! Soon though there's solid ground close by as the path leads up the glen, past a lochan and up to a small saddle. Here, flat-topped Dun Caan on Raasay, and the Trotternish ridge come into view. Descend steeply; cross a stile and continue with more pinnacles on your right. Pass a large cairn (30 minutes from the start of the descent) and make your way carefully down a scree slope. The well-used path, subject to rock falls and even partial collapse in places, demands respect. Cross a small gully where you need to use your hands and continue on to the car park (40 minutes from the large cairn).

MORE WALKS**MACLEOD'S TABLES**

On the Duirinish peninsula in westernmost Skye is a large and rugged expanse of wild and windswept moorland dominated by the unusual, flat-topped summits of Healabhal Mhor (MacLeod's Table North) and Healabhal Bheag (MacLeod's Table South). These twin tops are commonly referred to as MacLeod's Tables. Legend has it that the chief of the MacLeod clan once hosted a banquet on the summit of Healabhal Bheag in order to prove the superiority of his dining hall. Both tops can be visited on a 7-mile (11km) circuit starting and finishing from a small stream about 1.2km north of the hamlet of Orbst, on a minor road branching from the B884 Glendale road, which in turn branches from the A863 Dunvegan–Sligachan road, 1.3 miles southeast

Follow a vehicle track down to the shore and the first beach, with its scraps of coral among the black shingle. Here the track turns inland; continue on grass beside the shore. Soon cross a low cliff, descend to the shore and the second beach, with a grassy foreshore. Soon you reach the third and finest of the beaches, a gentle white crescent overlooked by a low rocky mesa, characteristic of this area. The Western Isles fill the horizon, while Dunvegan Head rises sharply to the northwest. To explore further, walk across grass from the end of the beach to the point (Grobhan na Sgeir), from where the Waternish peninsula comes into view. Go round a stone wall at the seaward end, step over a fence and follow paths across the steepish slope and down to tranquil Lovaig Bay. Retrace your steps to the start.

Lorgill & the Hoe

This walk affords magnificent views of the highest sea cliffs on Skye, and passes the remains of a village deserted in the 1830s. Allow two hours for the moderate 4-mile (6.4km) walk. It starts and finishes at Ramasaig farm; turn off the A863 Dunvegan–Sligachan road 1.3 miles southeast of Dunvegan along single-track B884. Eight miles along (and beyond Glendale village), turn left along a road signposted to Ramasaig. There's limited parking at the end of the road near the farmhouse. Glendale has two shops and the An Strupag licensed café. Use OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 408.

Walk down the farm track (muddy for about 250m), past farm buildings and an old stone byre on the left, and through a gate. The track climbs to the divide; descend to a gate with new views of the wide Lorgill River glen. You can spot the remains of at least 20 stone buildings and enclosures below. Leave the track and head south on intermittent sheep paths. Gain height south and southwest to overlook a green shelf below. An hour out, an isolated rocky knoll is a useful landmark and lookout. The wide views include the Cuillin, Western Isles, MacLeod's Tables and MacLeod's Maidens – delicate rock pinnacles offshore from Idrigill Point to the southeast. Keep as close as safely possible to the cliff edge on cropped grass. From the crest the dramatic vista of Waterstein Head (296m) and Neist Point is revealed. Descend into a wide glen, crossing a burn about 50m above the shore. Go through a gate then aim just right (east) of the farmhouse, up across the field on a track of sorts. Cross another burn near a cluster of ruined stone buildings, skirt a sheep pen and go through a small gate to the farm track and back to the start.

of Dunvegan. Parking here is very limited. The walk should take around 5½ hours to complete and involves 800m of ascent over some steep, rough ground. Use OS Explorer 1:25,000 map No 407.

ISLE OF RAASAY

Raasay is the quiet island sandwiched between Skye and the mainland. The bulk of the island is undulating upland and forest, and a circuit taking in the best features can be made in around seven hours from the pier where the ferry docks near

Inverarish. The circuit is 11 miles (18km) and involves 570m of ascent to the top of Dún Caan (443m), from where there are excellent views of the Cuillin, Trotternish and the mainland ranges. There are also several options for shorter walks. There is a hostel, a camp site, a hotel and a small shop on the island. The **Caledonian MacBrayne** (www.calmac.co.uk) car ferry (passenger/car £3/11, 15 minutes, at least nine services Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) sails from Sconser, a few miles northeast of Sligachan. Consult OS Landranger 1:50,000 map No 24.

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