

Day Walks on the Isle of Skye

20 ROUTES ON THE WINGED ISLE



Helen & Paul Webster



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Front cover: **Old Man of Storr** (*route 4*).

Back cover: **Quiraing** (*route 3*).

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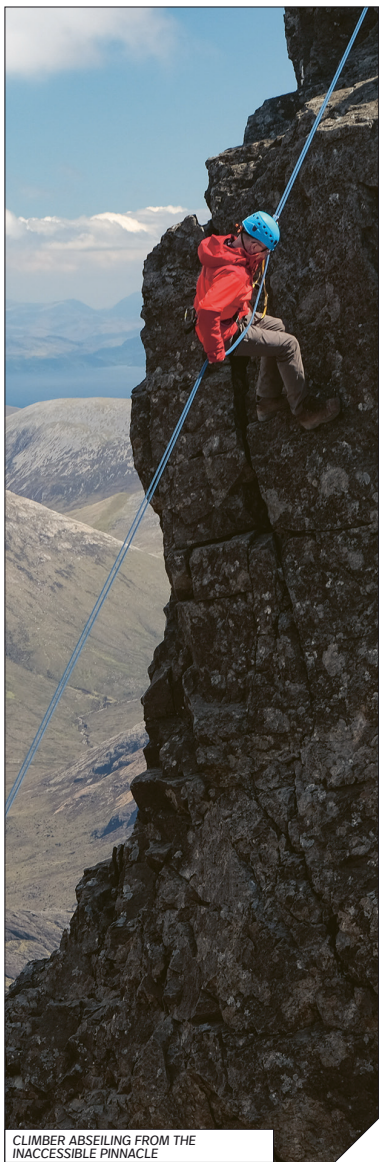
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CLIMBER ABSEILING FROM THE INACCESSIBLE PINNACLE



Trotternish & the Braes

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Day Walks on the Isle of Skye

AREA MAP & ROUTE FINDER

CONTAINS ORDNANCE SURVEY DATA © CROWN COPYRIGHT AND DATABASE RIGHT



CLEAT AND BEINN EDRA FROM THE QUIRAING



Introduction

Crossing the sea to the Isle of Skye, whether by bridge or boat, is a moment of excitement and anticipation. The landscapes of the mainland Highlands may be superb, but the Isle of Skye has always had a special magic all its own.

For many, the remarkable Black Cuillin are the main draw on Skye. Formed by an ancient volcanic eruption, the dark gabbro and basalt rocks of this imposing mountain range have eroded and splintered to form Britain's ultimate playground for mountaineers. This book details the ascents of the easier of these peaks, but the rocky terrain, route finding and scrambling make them unique in Scotland and a satisfying challenge. Just reaching the foot of the Inaccessible Pinnacle and watching the climbers inching up this dramatic fin of rock and abseiling off it is an experience to treasure. There's so much more to Skye's landscapes than the Cuillin, however. In the north, the Trotternish peninsula is dominated by a remarkable landslipped ridge, presenting a sheer escarpment below, which are the iconic rock features of The Storr and the Quiraing. Hillwalkers can head to the summits above for views unseen by the mass of visitors below.

Away from the mountains, Skye's coastline is a revelation to many visitors. Towering cliffs, natural arches, sea caves and stacks are waiting to be discovered far from the island's roads, giving the chance to see white-tailed eagles, otters and even whales. Telltale signs of past cultivation provide a glimpse into the life of previous generations, while the ruins of cleared villages tell of the cruelties of the past. Following the walks in this guidebook will get you away from the beaten track, but taking a trip across to the neighbouring Isle of Raasay truly feels like a different world. Here you can climb to the flat top of the volcanic plug of Dùn Caan for a different kind of island adventure.

One of the Gaelic names for Skye is *Eilean a' Cheò* – the island of mist – and with its position off the west coast, Skye gets its share of dramatic weather. Combined with the rugged landscape, this can make walking here a serious proposition. Paths are often boggy or rocky – and on some routes, non-existent. The Cuillin, in particular, demands route-finding skills beyond those needed for hillwalking elsewhere. This is a landscape which needs to be treated with the utmost respect.

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Section

1

Trotternish & the Braes

Trotternish is one of the most spectacular landscapes in Britain. The great ridge which forms its backbone is the longest on Skye, and its unique eastern escarpment has been broken by Europe's largest landslide into a remarkable landscape.

The coastline is equally spectacular. While the Kilt Rock and its waterfall are well known, much of the rest of the coastline is bristling with sea stacks and pinnacles, its hidden features revealed only by walking; Rubha Hunish, the northernmost peninsula, is regularly visited by minke whales in the summer.

The Braes region to the south has a similar feel to Trotternish, but on a smaller scale; it was here that crofters fought police during the Highland Clearances in the long struggle for security of tenure. Between Trotternish and the Braes is Portree, Skye's picturesque and bustling capital.









01 Ben Tianavaig

5.6km/3.5 miles

This diminutive coastal peak offers rewards far beyond the effort required to make the ascent.

Camustianavaig » Creagan na Sgalain » McQueen's Rock » Ben Tianavaig » McQueen's Rock » Camustianavaig

Start

Lay-by at Tianavaig Bay, Camustianavaig, south of Portree. GR: NG 508389.

The Walk

Well away from the usual tourist trail of Skye hotspots and overlooked by mountaineers, Ben Tianavaig deserves to be regarded as a classic shorter hill walk. It can be climbed in half a day and is a wonderful place to watch the sunset. Look out for white-tailed eagles which are plentiful here, or for dolphins passing through the Sound of Raasay far below.

The route starts from the beautiful, pebbly bay at Camustianavaig, a peaceful hamlet situated off the Braes road. The path climbs quickly and then hugs the coast, giving a fairly gentle ascent along a ridge that plunges steeply to the sea on your right; frequent stops are needed to appreciate the vista back

over Tianavaig Bay to the distant Cuillin peaks. While the path is narrow and near the cliff edge at times, the going is on short-cropped turf and is unusually dry underfoot for Skye.

The escarpment leads up to a couple of rocky steps, but they are easily negotiated, or passed to the left. The summit trig point reveals views over Portree Bay and along the Trotternish peninsula beyond.

An alternative, more adventurous and partly pathless descent meanders steeply down the cliffs through an atmospheric forest of rock pinnacles, but returning the same way is no hardship with those wonderful views ahead. After the walk, leave time to explore the bay which is a haunt of herons and otters.

BEN TIANAVAIG

DISTANCE: 5.6KM/3.5 MILES » **TOTAL ASCENT:** 392M/1,286FT » **START GR:** NG 508389 » **TIME:** ALLOW 3 HOURS
MAP: OS EXPLORER 410, SKYE: PORTREE & BRACADALE, 1:25,000 » **REFRESHMENTS:** AROS CENTRE, NEAR PORTREE; CAFE ARRIBA, PORTREE » **NAVIGATION:** STRAIGHTFORWARD; CARE NEEDED NEAR CLIFFS.
ALTERNATIVE RETURN ROUTE REQUIRES CAREFUL MAP READING AND IS ROUGH UNDERFOOT.

Directions – Ben Tianavaig



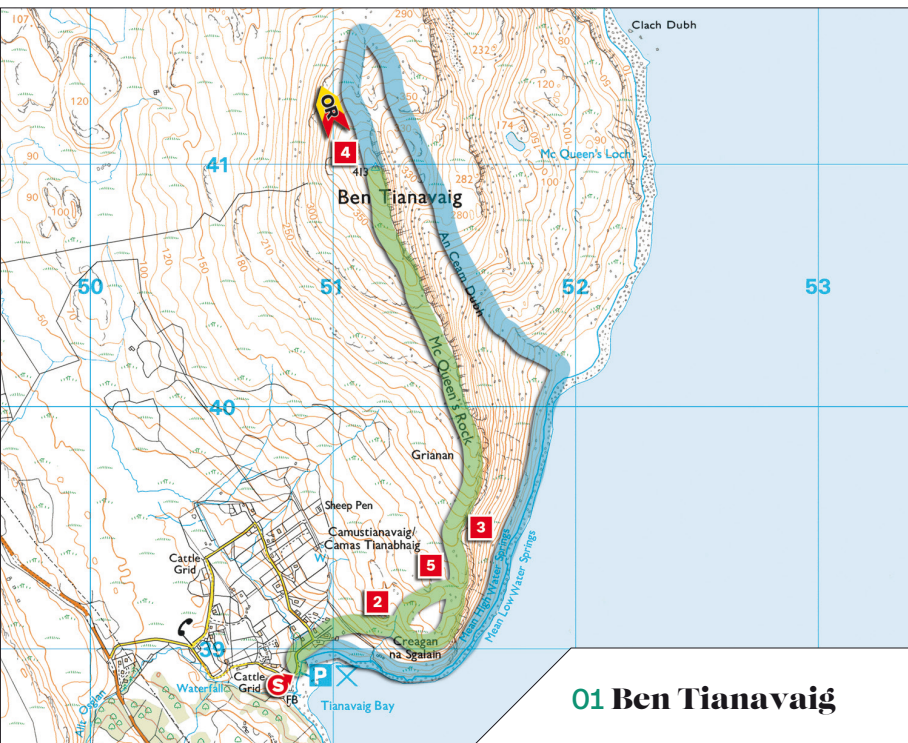
- 1** From Portree, the sheltered settlement of Camustianavaig is reached by heading south along the A87, taking the first turn on the left signed *Braes*, then following signs for *Camustianavaig* to reach the lay-by at the back of the bay where there is a picnic table. Start by **heading left as you face the sea to walk along the road**. **Turn right** at a red post box and immediately **take the path** (signed *Hill Path*) that heads up to the left of the gate. Climb up between fences to soon leave the houses behind and pass through rowan trees. Beyond the fences **bear right** on a faint path to climb uphill diagonally. When the gradient eases, reach a fork in the path.
- 2** **Branch right** at the fork. Keep above the steep cliff of Creagan na Sgalain; there are great views down to the sea and Tianavaig Bay below. The path is narrow in places and care is needed near the cliff edge, especially in blustery weather.
- 3** Round the corner and **keep climbing** and **follow the edge of the escarpment** known as McQueen's Rock. (Staying by the cliff edge offers the best coastal views but there is also an alternative just to the left.) **Climb a couple of easy, rocky steps** as the route continues uphill; again these can be bypassed if required. Almost all of the Isle of Raasay is in view to the right. Keep an eye out for porpoises and dolphins, which can often be spotted moving through the narrows. **Keep to the cliff edge** and continue climbing; the trig point on the 413m summit of Ben Tianavaig eventually comes into view.
- 4** The views from the summit back to the Cuillin Hills and the Broadford Red Hills are spectacular on a clear day. Portree and its harbour and bay are suddenly revealed as are stunning views up the easterly coastline of the Trotternish peninsula to the north of Portree. The huge pinnacle of the Old Man of Storr stands out against the skyline and it's worth hanging around to see if you can spot the white-tailed eagles which nest nearby. From the summit*, the easiest way back is to initially **retrace the outward route** back down over McQueen's Rock.



* It is possible to make a **more difficult return route** (not included in the times or distance given). From the summit, **continue along the escarpment for 400m** until it is possible to **descend to the right**. From here, a rough descent can be made down the grassy valley of the An Ceam Dubh beneath Ben Tianavaig's cliffs. Once opposite a prominent, flat green pasture right down by the sea, you can work your way down the very steep, heathery slopes to

reach it. A narrow path then leads **south** along the coast; it soon **ascends** to keep above the shore. As the southern end of Ben Tianavaig is rounded, the slope becomes very steep, but the path cuts across it and gives a practical route. Beyond this airy section, the shore is reached at Camustianavaig.

- 5** **Bear right** on the more direct alternative path instead of following the cliffs around Creagan na Sgalain to soon regain the path down through the trees and between the houses to reach the road. There are great views towards the Cuillin all the way back down.



01 Ben Tianavaig