

Cuillin Hills 8:

Soay Sound: Rubha an Dùnain



Rùbha an Dùnain, the promontory of the little fort (Gaelic) on the eastern end of Loch Brittle, is composed of Paleocene basaltic lavas and provides superb views of the lava-forming cliffs on the west side of the loch and of the Cuillin Hills to the NE. The terraced character of the lavas has produced a small freshwater loch, Loch na h-Àirde, that has been used as a settlement focus from the Iron Age through to the 1800s. The island of Soay is nearby, and in the distance are three of the Small Isles, Eigg, Rum and Canna. An excursion with wonderful views throughout.

Aspects covered: Paleocene basaltic plateau lavas; lateritised tops of lavas; Paleocene dykes of the regional swarm; section views of lava-dominated cliffs; geos (gio or gjá); views of the Cuillin Hills; glacial erratics.

Route: [Culnamean](#) (Glen Brittle) – [Buaille Dhubh](#) – [Creag Mhòr](#) – [Loch na h-Àirde](#) - [Rubha an Dùnain](#) - [Camas a' Mhùrain](#) - [Creag Mhòr](#) (- return [Culnamean](#)).

Distance: 12 kilometres.

Time: 6/7 hours.

General comments: This excursion is on relatively level ground and makes use of an excellent track as far south as [Creag Mhòr](#). Thereafter, there is a good route, partly on paths, clockwise around [Càrn Mor](#), to [Loch na h-Àirde](#) and [Rubha an Dùnain](#), then NE along the coast past [Camas a' Mhùrain](#), to join the track again at [Creag Mhòr](#) and back to [Culnamean](#). Low tides are not essential. Much of this excursion is focussed on general observations, near and far. Spectacular views of the southern part of the Cuillin Hills are available all day, weather permitting!

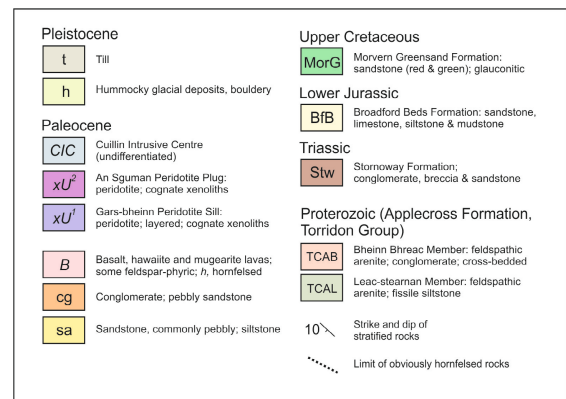
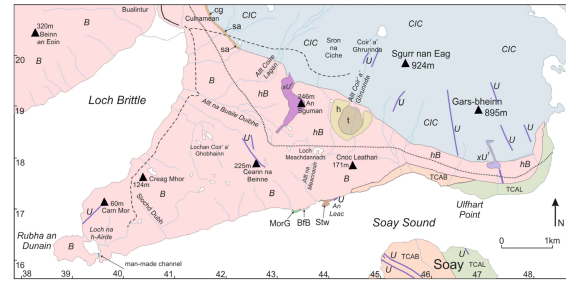


Figure Cuillin 8.1: Simplified geological map and annotated Google Earth® images of the Soay Sound area.

[Glen Brittle](#) lies on the west side of the main Cuillin ridge at the head of [Loch Brittle](#). Follow the Broadford-Portree (A87) road to [Sligachan](#) (26km (16 miles) from [Broadford](#) and 14km (9 miles) from [Portree](#)). Take the Dunvegan (A863) road along [Glen Drynoch](#) to the [Carbost \(B8009\) road](#) (8km; 5 miles). From here, follow the Carbost road, along the south side of [Loch Harport](#), as far as [Merkadale](#) (2.5km (1.5 miles)) and thence take the minor road signposting [Glen Brittle](#). Descend into [Glen Brittle](#) (Glenn Bhretail) and continue to the [end of the public road](#), to the entrance to the campsite (13km; 8 miles). Parking is available at the side of the track leading to the [campsite](#) above [Glen Brittle beach](#).

From [Culnamean](#), head south along the well-defined and good track towards [Rubha an Dùnain](#). Access to the track is from behind the campsite toilet block. After c. 1.5km (c.1 mile), cross the [Allt Coire Làgan](#), using the [metal bridge](#) west (downstream) of the track if needed. Continue as far as [Creag Mhòr](#) (c. 4km; 2.5 miles). From

here, head south, on the east side of [Càrn Mòr](#), for c. 1km to reach the abandoned farming settlement at [\[NG 4012 1657\]](#) that was the hereditary homeland of Clan MacAskill, coast watchers and guardians of Clan McLeod. The most elaborate house with the (craw) stepped gables, belonged to the chief of the clan. The population of several tens left during the mid-19th Century clearances, emigrating to the USA and New Zealand. By the 1861 census, the settlement was abandoned.

Locality 1 [\[NG 4012 1657\]](#):



Figure Cuillin 8.2: Abandoned village, NE of Loch na h-Àirde.

Continue around the north side of [Loch na h-Àirde](#) to the chambered cairn.

Locality 2 [\[NG 3929 1640\]](#):

On the NW side of the loch there is a Neolithic (Bronze Age, 3500 years BP – 2500 years BP) chambered cairn east of a NW-SE -trending wall. Excavated in the 1930s, it yielded the remains of six adults, together with fragments of Beaker pottery and flint scrapers.



Figure Cuillin 8.3: Loch na h-Àirde, viewed towards the SW.

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Figure Cuillin 8.4: Chambered cairn, NW of Loch na h-Àirde.

Retrace your steps to walk clockwise around the loch to the SE corner, where an excavated and lined channel/canal joins the freshwater loch to the sea.

Locality 3 [\[NG 3943 1623\]](#):

The loch is less than 10m above sea-level, hence the possibility of constructing a channel/canal, to connect the two, although still a remarkable feat by its 12th Century Norse/Viking builders. This enabled them to access the loch as a safe harbour. Fragments of boat timber have been recovered from the loch and it is considered possible that it was a Medieval shipyard with wharves and docks.



Figure Cuillin 8.5: Medieval canal linking Loch na h-Àirde with the sea. View is towards the north.

Continue SE to the obvious blockwork wall, a dun, or fort, at [\[NG 3958 1595\]](#) constructed in the Iron Age (?600BC – 300AD). It is of drystone construction, with an intra-mural gallery, rebated entrance and low scarcement (shelf).

Locality 4 [\[NG 3958 1595\]](#):



Figure Cuillin 8.6: Iron Age dun, or fort, SE of Loch na h-Àirde. View is towards the east to Creag a' Chapaill, and beyond.

Now for the geology, which is set out, below, as views with brief descriptions. All are within 500m of [Loch na h-Àirde](#) and will be encountered when walking over the area.

Locality 5 [\[NG 3958 1595\]](#):



Figure Cuillin 8.7: View east from the Iron Age dun towards Creag a' Chapaill, comprising terraces built of Paleocene basaltic lavas, with the southern part of the Cuillin Hills, composed of gabbros and peridotites of the Paleocene Cuillin Intrusive Centre, beyond.



Figure Cuillin 8.8: View west from the dun towards Sgeir Mhòr, comprising terraces built of basaltic lavas.



Figure Cuillin 8.9: Weathered top of a basaltic lava, overlain by a jointed hawaiite lava, north of Sgeir Mhòr. Pole c. 1m long.



Figure Cuillin 8.10: View NE across Loch na h-Àirde, comprising terraces built of basaltic lavas.



Figure Cuillin 8.11: View SW towards Loch na h-Àirde and Rubha an Dùnain, with Rum (left) and Canna (right), beyond.



Figure Cuillin 8.12: View SW towards Rubha an Dùnain, with Rum (left) and Canna (right), beyond.



Figure Cuillin 8.13: Basaltic lavas intruded by dolerite dykes on the NE side of Camas a' Mhùrain. In the distance are the Cuillin Hills, composed of gabbros and peridotites of the Cuillin Intrusive Centre. Each of the buttress-forming arêtes of the Cuillin Hills is sandwiched by glacially scoured corries.



Figure Cuillin 8.14: Basaltic lavas intruded by dolerite dykes on the NE side of Camas a' Mhùrain. In the distance is Sgùrr Dearg, forming one of the buttress peaks on the west side of the Cuillin Hills.



Figure Cuillin 8.15: Wide dolerite dyke within jointed basaltic lavas, NE side of Camas a' Mhùrain. View is towards the NE.



Figure Cuillin 8.16: Cliffs on NW side of Loch Brittle, composed of basaltic lavas intruded by dolerite dykes and inclined sheets. View is towards the NW from SE side of Loch Brittle.



Figure Cuillin 8.17: Detail of cliffs on NW side of Loch Brittle, composed of basaltic lavas intruded by dolerite dykes and inclined sheets. View is towards the NW from SE side of Loch Brittle.



Figure Cuillin 8.18: Detail of cliffs with a geo (gully, or gio or gjá) on NW side of Loch Brittle at Geodha na h-Airigh Mòire, formed where a Paleocene dyke of the NW-SE - trending swarm has been preferentially eroded. View is towards the NW from the SE side of Loch Brittle.



Figure Cuillin 8.19: Geo (gio or gjá) formed by differential erosion of a dyke, NW of Càrn Mòr, on the SE side of Loch Brittle.



Figure Cuillin 8.20: Inclined dolerite intrusion within a jointed basaltic lava, north of Sgeir Mhòr.



Figure Cuillin 8.21: Vertical face of dolerite dyke, with hexagonal cooling joint development, east of Camas a' Mhùrain.



Figure Cuillin 8.22: Block (glacial erratic) of pelite on coast west of Iron Age dun (south of Loch na h-Àirde). Pole c. 1m long.



Figure Cuillin 8.23: Sgùrr Alasdair and Coireachan Ruadha
Craggs at the head (back) of Coire Làgan.

Return to [Culnamean](#).

End of excursion.