

## North Skye 3:

# The Old Man of Storr and The Storr



The Storr, at 719m OD, is the highest point on the inland escarpment that forms the backbone of Trotternish in north Skye. The escarpment is composed of Paleocene lavas and has partially collapsed, with landslipped and toppled blocks littering its east side. The most famous of these blocks is the Old Man of Storr (Bodach an Stoir), a c. 50m tall pillar of lava in Coire Faoin. There is more than one explanation to the name: it may relate to a giant who was buried and the pillar is his thumb, or it is two giants, an old man and his wife turned to stone, with his wife being Needle Rock, another spectacular rock pillar to the north.

**Aspects covered:** Paleocene lavas of the Beinn Edra Formation; Paleocene NW-SE -trending dykes of the regional swarm; landslipped material; moraines.

**Route:** [Road NE of Bearreraig Cottage](#) - [Coire Faoin](#) - [Old Man of Storr](#) - [Needle Rock](#) - [The Storr](#) (- return to road).

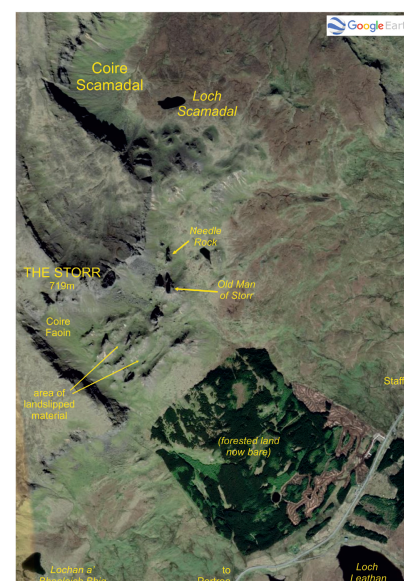
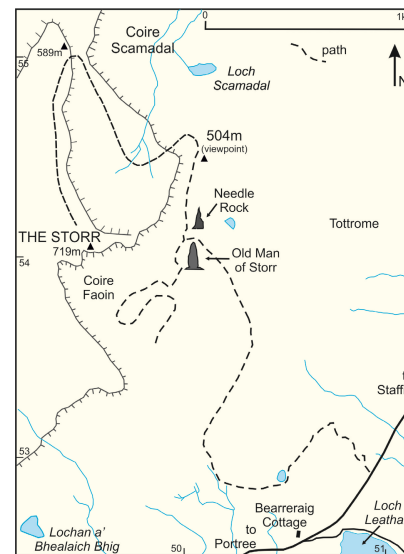
**Distance:** 4 kilometres (or 8km if [The Storr](#) is included).

**Time:** 3 hours (or 6/7 hours if [The Storr](#) is included).

**General comments:** A visit to the [Old Man of Storr](#) is one of the most popular tourist attractions on Skye. Having the view to yourself is nye on impossible, but possibly in

the Winter months if lucky. Consequently, roadside parking, although greatly increased over the years, struggles to keep pace with tourist demand. To avoid disappointment, time your visit, as best you can, to avoid peak arrival times. Park only where permitted. The path through the deforested lower ground is very clear and is of reasonable quality, although subject to becoming muddy during wet spells.

The roadside parking is located on the Portree-Staffin (A835) road (via the A855 road section), 9km (6 miles) north of [Portree](#) at the northern end of [Loch Leathan](#). From the parking area, go through the gate and follow the main path, uphill. The ascent should take 30-45 minutes, depending on how many photograph/viewing stops are made. The paths thereafter are self-evident: in the lower part of [Coire Faoin](#) and around the base of the [Old Man of Storr](#) and the base of [Needle Rock](#). The classic viewpoint is north of the two rock pillars at [\[NG 5009 5447\]](#) at a height of 504m OD.

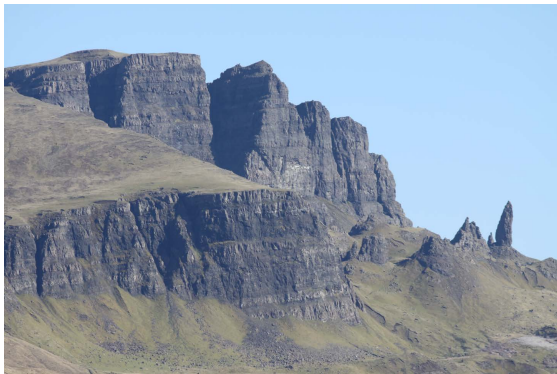


**Figure North Skye 3.1:** Summary map and annotated Google Earth® image of The Storr - Old Man of Storr area.

The local geology can be divided into two parts. East of the Portree-Staffin (A835/A855) road, Middle Jurassic strata intruded by Paleocene dolerite sills dip at a shallow angle to the west. West of the road these rocks are overlain by a spectacular sequence of Paleocene plateau lavas forming the inland escarpment that runs from just north of [Portree](#), north to [Sròn Vourlinn](#), west of [Flodigarry](#), a distance of c. 30km (20 miles). Along much of this escarpment, landslips have formed, possibly starting near to the end of the glaciation events in the Pleistocene Epoch, and certainly into the Holocene Epoch. The pinnacles of the [Old Man of Storr](#) and [Needle Rock](#) are essentially landslipped outliers of the lava-dominated cliff. Glacial moraines and peat mask parts of the underlying solid geology.



**Figure North Skye 3.2:** The Storr escarpment and the coastal cliffs at Berreraig Bay. View is towards the NW from Raasay.



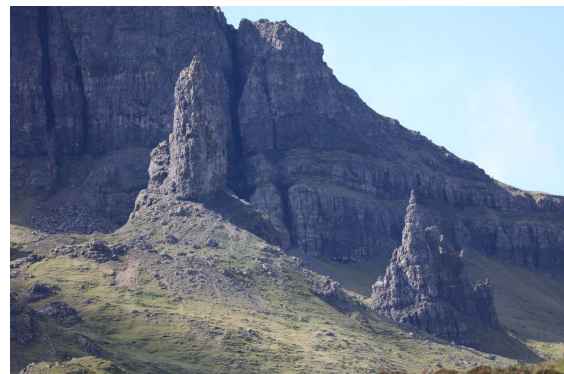
**Figure North Skye 3.3:** The Storr escarpment and the Old Man of Storr. View is towards the north from west of Loch Leathan.



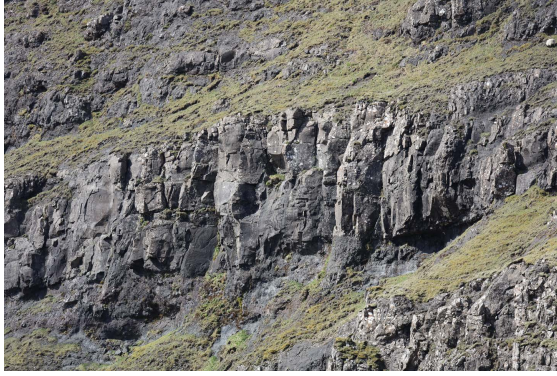
**Figure North Skye 3.4:** The Storr and the (partially obscured) Old Man of Storr. View is towards the SW from the Portree-Staffin (A855) road.

Follow the path to where [The Storr](#) escarpment and the [Old Man of Storr](#) come into view. The views into [Coire Faoin](#), of the vertical face of [The Storr](#), the [Old Man of Storr](#) and [Needle Rock](#) are spectacular, irrespective of the weather. In the following text, specific localities are not used, rather a general route is suggested, which can be modified as required.

These lavas form part of the Beinn Edra Formation, lowest in the plateau lava sequence of north Skye, and are typically non-porphyrific basalts, but with a few porphyritic basalt lavas and more evolved lavas (benmoreite and mugearite) towards the top. The lavas exposed on the [Old Man of Storr](#) and [Needle Rock](#), plus other major outcrops away from the main cliff face of [The Storr](#), are not *in situ*, having moved east as part of a complex landslip system.



**Figure North Skye 3.5:** The Old Man of Storr (left) and Needle Rock (right), with the cliffs NE of The Storr in the background. View is towards the NW. For scale, the Old Man of Storr is c. 50m from base to top.



**Figure North Skye 3.6:** Prismatic-jointed sheet lava within the Beinn Edra Formation outcrop of The Storr volcanic sequence.

Red lateritised tops to the lavas are common throughout [The Storr](#) sequence. Also present in the screes are blocks of bright red laterite representing complete alteration (during the Paleocene) of lava to a soil, together with lateritised lava representing an intermediate stage of weathering.

One of the most striking features of these lavas is the presence of amygdales of various zeolites. These include: analcime (trapezohedral crystals); chabazite (clusters of rhombohedra up to 5mm); thomsonite (white or bluish, compact, fibrous masses); stilbite (cream-coloured, radiating bundles); laumontite (long, delicate fibres); mesolite (white, hair-like fibres), plus other, less-common varieties. Other amygdale minerals are chlorite and opaline silica. Although zeolites can be recovered from the lava exposures, weathered-out samples of up to 3cm across, showing the crystal characteristics noted above, are best recovered from the soil and rock screes in the vicinity of the path on the SW side of the [Old Man of Storr](#).



**Figure North Skye 3.7:** Reddened, lateritic top to an amygdaloidal basaltic lava at the base of the Old Man of Storr. Hammer c. 30cm long.



**Figure North Skye 3.8:** Amygdaloidal basaltic lava at the base of the Old Man of Storr. Coin c. 20mm across.



**Figure North Skye 3.9:** Amygdaloidal basaltic lava at the base of the Old Man of Storr. Note some of the vesicles are not completely filled. Coin c. 20mm across.

In the cliff face of [The Storr](#) escarpment, at the back of [Coire Faoin](#), not to be approached due to its inherent instability, uncommon Paleocene basalt and dolerite dykes intrude the lava sequence. Prominent vertical gullies in the escarpment are the result of the inweathering of these dykes.



**Figure North Skye 3.10:** The vertical east face of The Storr, composed of interbedded compound (pahoehoe) and simple (sheet) prismatic-jointed lavas. The vertical gullies mark the locations of inweathered dykes. Face is c. 200m from base to top. View is towards the west.



**Figure North Skye 3.12:** The NE face of the Old Man of Storr, a pillar of inclined basaltic lavas that has detached from the main (*in situ*) sequence of The Storr escarpment. Note person for scale at the base of the pillar.

Follow the path from the Old Man of Storr, north between the [The Storr](#) cliff face and Needle Rock.



**Figure North Skye 3.11:** The SE face of Coire Faoin, with uncommon basaltic dykes intruded into the lava sequence. View is towards the SW.



**Figure North Skye 3.13:** Needle Rock, a pillar of inclined basaltic lavas that has detached from the main (*in situ*) sequence of The Storr escarpment. View is towards the north.



**Figure North Skye 3.14:** Needle Rock, a pillar of inclined basaltic lavas that has detached from the main (*in situ*) sequence of The Storr escarpment. Note the 'eyes' of the Needle. View is towards the NE.



**Figure North Skye 3.15:** The eye(s) of Needle Rock, a pillar of inclined basaltic lavas that has detached from the main (*in situ*) sequence of The Storr escarpment. View is towards the NE.

The view south from the 504m OD viewpoint at [\[NG 5009 5447\]](#), to [Needle Rock](#) and beyond to the [Old Man of Storr](#), is one of the classic views of the landslipped material at the base of [The Storr](#) escarpment.

Note the [perched lochan](#) east of [Needle Rock](#), due to the impermeable nature of the landslipped debris and overlying moraines.



**Figure North Skye 3.16:** View south to Needle Rock and beyond to the Old Man of Storr from the 504m viewpoint. Note disparate dips of the various masses of lava.



**Figure North Skye 3.17:** Perched lochan east of Needle Rock, with adjacent steeply dipping block of lava. View is towards the north.



**Figure North Skye 3.18:** The Storr escarpment, composed of interbedded thick, simple, prismatic-jointed lavas and stratified compound lavas, viewed towards the SSW from the 504m viewpoint. Note the significant apron of scree at the base of the escarpment.

From here, either return to the road, or head for the summit of [The Storr](#). Ascent should only be attempted with good weather conditions and will add at least 3-4 hours to the excursion.

Follow the path north, above (west of) [Coire Scamadail](#), towards [An Càrn Liath](#). From here, a spur of the path leads south towards [The Storr](#). This part of the path is on good, well-drain ground, well back from the cliff face and is helpfully indicated by marker piles of stones.

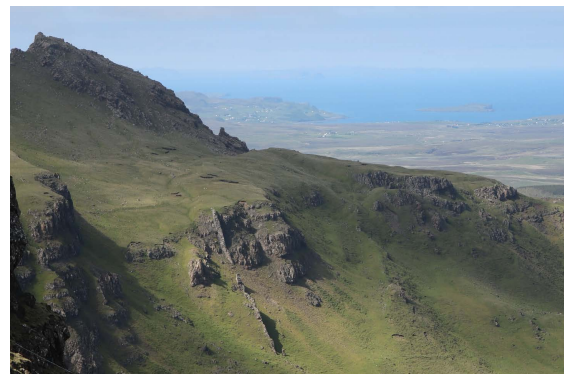
It is stressed that you should stay well away from the cliff edge, which has many indents: it is all too easy to become disoriented, especially if the weather deteriorates. Equally important, it should be remembered that the cliff face is unstable.



**Figure North Skye 3.19:** The Storr escarpment viewed from the north towards the SSW. The route from the 504m viewpoint to the summit (at 719m OD) involves ascending the north side of The Storr from An Càrn Liath, west, well away from the main cliff face.



**Figure North Skye 3.20:** Landslipped lava, south of Loch Scamadail in Coire Scamadail. View is towards the east, with the low-lying island of Rona (composed of basement Lewisian Gneiss Complex) in the Sound of Raasay.



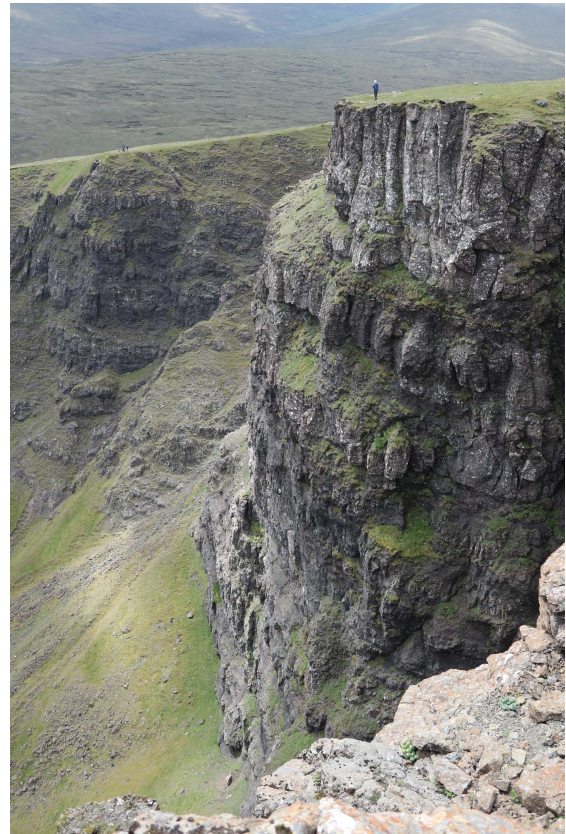
**Figure North Skye 3.21:** Landslipped lava at An Càrn Liath, on the north side of Coire Scamadail. View is towards the north, with Staffin in the distance. Note prominent (and still vertical) outweathered dyke within the lavas.



**Figure North Skye 3.22:** Path to the summit of The Storr, west of and well away from the main cliff face. Marker piles of stones assist with identifying the location of the path. The ground is firm, well drained and offers a good walking surface.



**Figure North Skye 3.23:** The summit of The Storr, marked by a trigonometrical point (triangulation station) at 719m OD. The vegetation cover is thin, and the ground is well drained.



**Figure North Skye 3.24:** The main vertical cliff face of The Storr, in places c. 100m in height. View is towards the south. Iain Allison for scale.



**Figure North Skye 3.25:** Example of where The Storr cliff is unstable, with large semi-detached blocks of lava.

The ascent of The Storr provides a superb 360° panorama *and* a view down (eastward) on The Old Man of Storr, Needle Rock, and the many other disorientated blocks of landslipped lava.

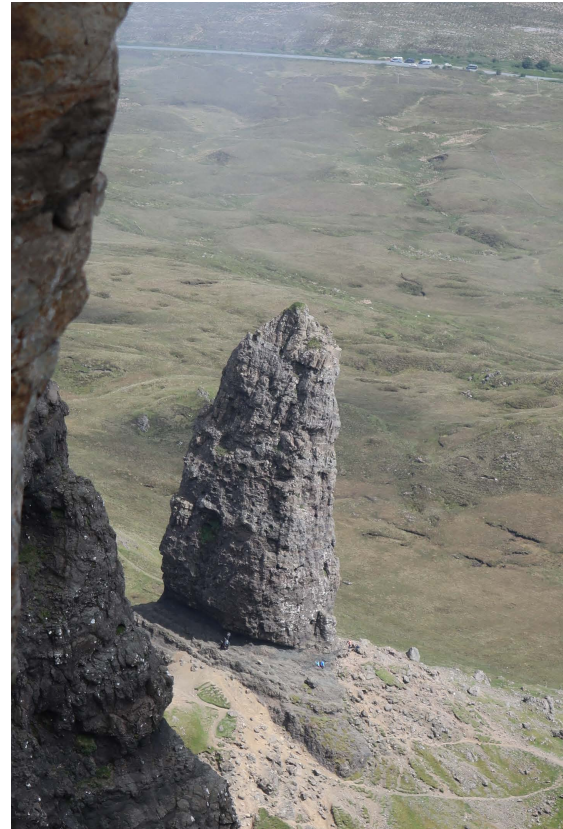
At all times stay well away from the cliff face.



**Figure North Skye 3.26:** The Old Man of Storr (far left) and other landslipped blocks of lava to the south, from The Storr. View is towards the east and shows the heavily eroded paths from the main public (A855) road. In the distance, on the cliff-fringed eastern edge of Trotternish, is the Berreraig Bay hydro-electric power plant.



**Figure North Skye 3.27:** Detail of The Old Man of Storr and other landslipped blocks of lava to the south, from The Storr. View is towards the east.



**Figure North Skye 3.28:** Detail of The Old Man of Storr, from The Storr. Note people for scale. View is towards the east.



**Figure North Skye 3.29:** Detail of landslipped blocks south of The Old Man of Storr, from The Storr. View is towards the east.





**Figure North Skye 3.30:** Landslipped blocks south of The Old Man of Storr, from The Storr. In the distance is Loch Leathan, the feeder to the Bearreraig Bay hydro-electric power plant. View is towards the east.



**Figure North Skye 3.31:** Detail of landslipped blocks south of The Old Man of Storr, from The Storr.

Return to the road by reversing the route taken.

End of excursion.