

# West Skye 5: Dunvegan Head



*Dunvegan Head, in north Duirinish, is a spectacular cliff-fringed promontory built of Paleocene basaltic lavas. It offers wonderful views west to North and South Uist and Benbecula in the Outer Hebrides, as well as east to Waternish and south to Macleod's Tables in the southern part of Duirinish.*

**Aspects covered:** Large-scale architecture of Paleocene basaltic-mugearitic plateau lavas; small-scale internal characteristics of the lavas; lateritised tops of lavas; dykes of the Paleocene regional swarm; a major landslip.

**Route:** [Galtrigill](#) – [The Manners Stone \[NG 1814 5473\]](#) – [north side of Galtrigill Burn](#) – [Biod an Athair \(Trig\(onometric\) Point \(Triangulation Station\)\)](#) – [Geodh' an Tairbh](#) – [Dunvegan Head](#) – [Am Famhair](#) (- return [Galtrigill](#)).

**Distance:** 8km (5 miles).

**Time:** 4-5 hours.

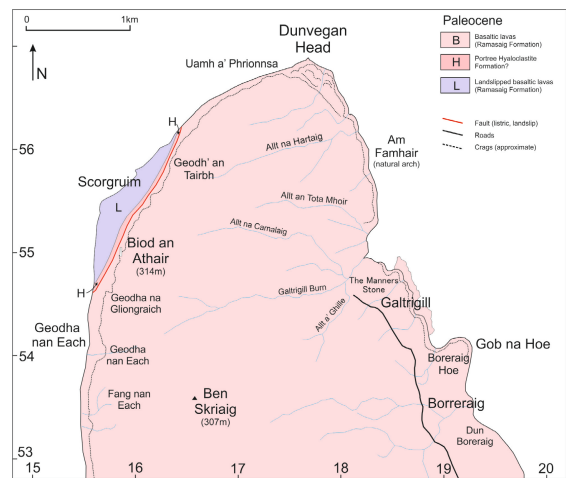
**General comments:** From [Dunvegan](#), take the A863 SE for c. 2km and then SW on the B884 for c. 1km to where it continues west, [signposted for Glendale](#). After passing through [Colbost](#), take the minor road signposted [Husabost](#) at the [junction at \[NG 2054 4988\]](#). Continue north to the end of the public road at [Galtrigill](#). Limited parking is available, with care, at the end of the public road at [Galtrigill](#).

The [Galtrigill Burn](#) is located in a near-vertical-sided ravine where it enters [Loch Dunvegan](#) and so cannot be crossed anywhere near the coast, with the implication that if the sea arch, [Am Famhair](#) is visited towards the end of the excursion, it will be necessary to traverse along the north side of the [Galtrigill Burn](#) to identify a suitable safe fording point, which will depend upon the flow conditions of the burn.

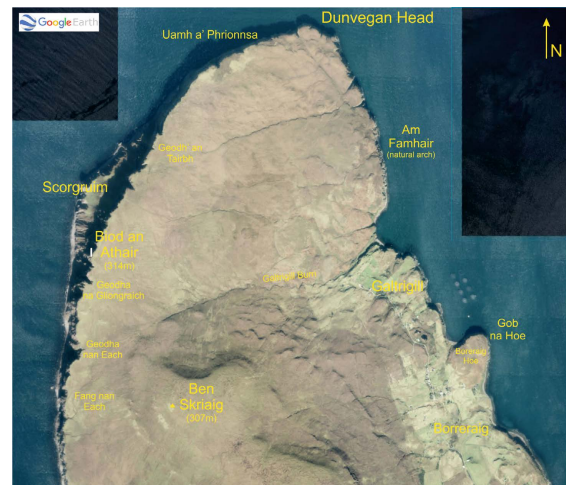
The [The Manners Stone \[NG 1814 5473\]](#) is worth a brief visit: sitting upon it should instil good manners, if needed.



**Figure West Skye 5.1:** The Manners Stone, Galtrigill.



**Figure West Skye 5.2:** Geological map of the northern part of the Dunvegan Head peninsula.



**Figure West Skye 5.3:** Annotated Google Earth® image of the northern part of the Dunvegan Head peninsula.

To the SE, across Loch Dunvegan, are the [Coral Beaches](#) at [Claigan](#), connected to the small island of [Lampay](#) by a tombolo of coral sand. North of [Lampay](#) are the islands of [Iosaigh](#), [Mingay](#) and [Clett](#), composed of a dolerite sill of the Palaeocene Little Minch Sill Complex.



**Figure West Skye 5.4:** The Coral Beaches of Claigan, with Beinn Bhreac, beyond. View is towards the east across Loch Dunvegan.

To access the first main location, [Biod an Athair \(Trig\(onometric\) Point \(Triangulation Station\)\)](#), the [Galtrigill Burn](#) needs to be crossed at c. [\[NG 1800 5468\]](#). Head WNW across the open moorland with [Ben Skriag](#) (307m OD) to the south. There is no path, although progress is improved where short lengths of sheep tracks are encountered.

The cliffs that fringe the coast of the [Dunvegan Head](#) peninsula are composed of basaltic lavas of the Ramasaig Formation.

**Locality 1 [\[NG 1582 5494\]](#):**

The 313m [Biod an Athair \(Trig\(onometric\) Point \(Triangulation Station\)\)](#), is located atop an unfenced (inland) cliff of over 100m height, composed of Paleocene Ramasaig Formation basaltic lavas. Under appropriate (lighting) conditions, various features of the lavas, such as joint sets and weathered tops, can be identified. Below is the platform, [Scorgruim](#), composed of very difficult-to-access landslipped (and very similar) basaltic lavas, providing good feeding for daredevil sheep.

The landslipped block of lavas that forms the broad shelf, [Scorgruim](#), is one of many that fringes the Skye Lava Field, the most famous being The Storr and The Quiraing landslips on the east side of Trotternish. The sea cliffs that flank [Scorgruim](#) are similarly vertical and dangerously unstable.

Due west, across The Little Minch, are the Outer Hebrides, here, North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist. To the east is (the) [Waterness](#) (peninsula); to the south, the flat-topped hills are [Macleod's Tables](#).



**Figure West Skye 5.5:** The Biod an Athair inland cliff, composed of Paleocene Ramasaig Formation basaltic lavas.



**Figure West Skye 5.6:** The broad shelf, Scorgruim, composed of landslipped basaltic lavas. View is from close to the Biod an Athair Trigonometrical Point, towards the NW.

Continue NE along the inland cliff towards [Dunvegan Head](#). The height of the cliffs diminishes.



**Figure West Skye 5.7:** The northern section of the Biod an Athair inland cliff, composed of Palaeocene Ramasaig Formation basaltic lavas.



**Figure West Skye 5.8:** The seaward unstable edge of the broad shelf, Scorgruim, composed of landslipped basaltic lavas. View is from north of the Trigonometrical Point, towards the SW.



**Figure West Skye 5.9:** Jointed vertical dolerite dyke of the Skye Main Dyke Swarm intruded into basaltic lavas in the northern part of the Biod an Athair inland cliff section.



**Figure West Skye 5.10:** View of the broad shelf, Scorgruim, towards the south.



**Figure West Skye 5.11:** Detached mass of collapsed basaltic lava on the coast at the northern end of the broad shelf, Scorgruim.



**Figure West Skye 5.12:** The c. 200m high lava cliffs at Geodh' an Tairbh, viewed towards the south, with the broad shelf, Scorgruim, comprising landslipped lavas, in the distance.

Further spectacular sea views are available at [Dunvegan Head](#), especially east to lava-dominated [Waternish](#) and, beyond, to the northern end of [Trotternish](#), built of Middle Jurassic strata intruded by thick Paleocene dolerite and picrite sills of the Little Minch Sill Complex.

From [Dunvegan Head](#), the route clockwise around the coast is relatively hard going, with some steep ravines that dissect the coastline, requiring minor detours inland (to the west). Either return by the outward route, or continue clockwise to the natural sea arch, [Am Famhair](#). However, it is important to note that the [Galtrigill Burn](#) cannot be crossed anywhere near the coast, requiring a walk of up to 500m along its north side until a suitable

safe fording point can be identified, which will depend upon the flow conditions of the burn.



**Figure West Skye 5.13:** The sea arch, Am Famhair, SE of Dunvegan Head.

Return to the end of the public road.

End of excursion.