

SW Skye 4:

Oronsay, Loch Bracadale



Oronsay (Norse: tidal island) is located in Loch Bracadale, with superb views SE towards the Cuillin Hills, and a 360° panorama of the lava plateau. This small island is composed wholly of Paleocene lavas and offers excellent views of cliff sections, although none are accessible. Crossing the gravel and boulder tombolo from Ullinish Point on the Skye 'mainland' to Oronsay, you arrive in what feels like a different place. But beware, entry and exit are only possible when the tide is favourable, although only during Spring tides is this an issue.

Aspects covered: various features of the Paleocene volcanic sequence.

Route: [Ullinish](#) – [Ullinish Point](#) - [Oronsay](#) (- return [Ullinish](#)).

Distance: 5 kilometres (2 miles).

Time: 3/4 hours.

General comments: A relatively 'low energy' excursion on low ground. The main issue is tidal access: before crossing, ensure that the tides allow for a safe return. Two to three hours should enable an ascent to the 72m OD summit, to take in the spectacular 360° view and the west-facing (inaccessible) cliff sections. Try to reach [Oronsay](#) just as the tide falls to a state that crossing is possible.

Access is from [Ullinish](#), on the north side of [Loch Bracadale](#). From [Sligachan](#) or [Dunvegan](#), take the main (A863) road towards Bracadale. [Ullinish](#) can be reached from either end of a [minor loop road](#), signposted [Ullinish](#) at both ends. From [Ullinish](#), follow the minor road to the south, to the signpost 'Oronsay Path.' At the end of the public road there is parking. From there, follow the sign 'Oronsay via Tidal Causeway' southwards along the track. Two gates are encountered, one a 'kissing gate.' From here, head SW across the open boggy ground on the east side of [Ard nan Gamhain](#) (with two gates) to the tidal causeway (tombolo) to [Oronsay](#).

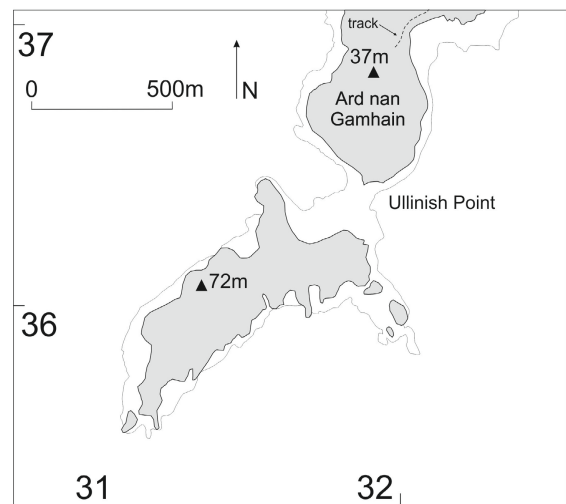
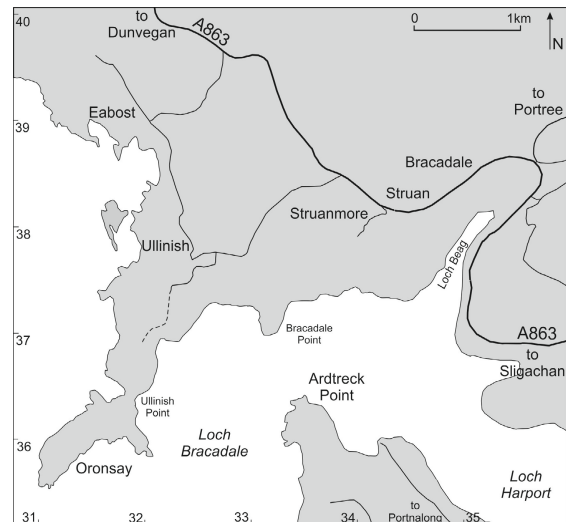


Figure SW Skye 4.1: Location map and aerial image of Oronsay, Loch Bracadale.

Locality 1 [\[NG 3133 3597\]](#):

From the point where the tombolo is crossed onto [Oronsay](#), there is a relatively straight route to the 72m OD summit and this can be taken directly if time is limited. However, an alternative strategy is to walk around the island above (and not too close to) the significant

encircling cliffs. There is no safe access to the vast majority of the coastline.

Points of interest include:

1. The boulder-dominated tombolo separating [Oronsay](#) from [Ullinish Point](#) to the north.



Figure SW Skye 4.2: Oronsay tombolo from Ullinish Point.



Figure SW Skye 4.3: Oronsay tombolo from Oronsay towards Ullinish Point.

2. A geo (Gaelic: geodha; Old Norse gjá), a NW-SE - trending, steep-sided gully on the central east side of the island, formed by marine erosion and rock collapse. At the NW end of the geo there is a small sea cave. Other geos occur to the SW and trend SSW-NNE.



Figure SW Skye 4.4: Gully (geo) and cave, east central Oronsay.



Figure SW Skye 4.5: Gully (geo) and caves, SE Oronsay.

3. At the SW end of the island there is a significant wave-cut rock platform with one obvious isolated sea stack separated from a linear cluster of smaller stacks by recently formed angular debris.

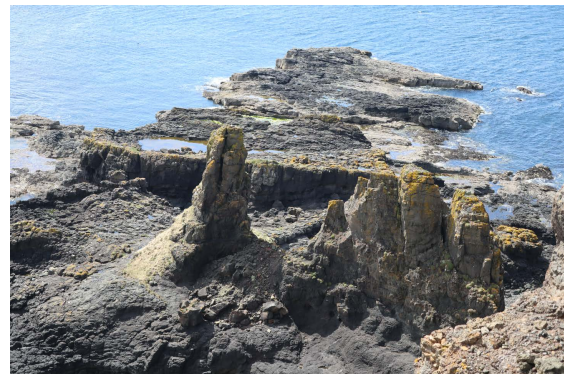


Figure SW Skye 4.6: Sea stacks on the significant wave-cut platform at the SW end of Oronsay. Note collapsed material at the base of the largest (left) stack.

4. The west-facing cliff below the summit, composed of near-horizontal tabular sheets of basalt lava, with reddened tops formed by contemporaneous weathering during the Paleocene.



Figure SW Skye 4.7: Tabular (sheet) lavas with reddened (laterite) tops, indicating periods of subaerial weathering during hiatuses in the volcanism. View is towards the north from near to the summit of Oronsay (72m OD).



Figure SW Skye 4.8: Tabular (sheet) lavas with reddened (laterite) tops, indicating periods of subaerial weathering during hiatuses in the volcanism. View is towards the south from near to the summit of Oronsay (72m OD).

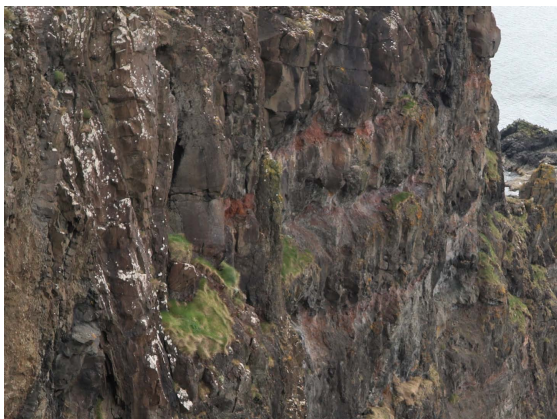


Figure SW Skye 4.9: Detail of tabular (sheet) lavas with reddened (laterite) tops, indicating periods of subaerial weathering during hiatuses in the volcanism. View is towards the south from near to the summit of Oronsay (72m OD).

erosion within the lava field during hiatuses in the volcanism. The poor sorting and unstratified nature of the deposit indicates some form of debris flow transport mechanism.



Figure SW Skye 4.10: Unstratified volcanoclastic sedimentary material, with obvious angular to rounded clasts in c. 70m high west-facing cliff in central Oronsay.

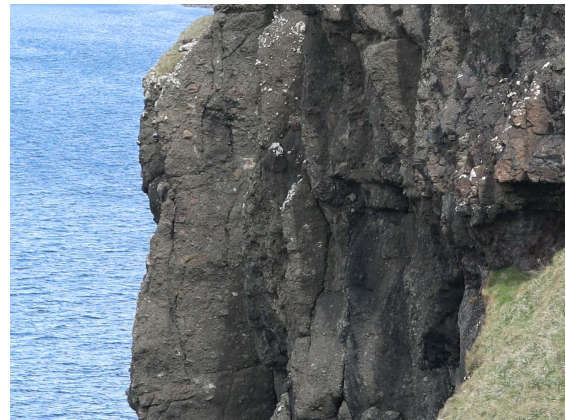


Figure SW Skye 4.11: Detail of unstratified volcanoclastic sedimentary material, with obvious angular to rounded clasts in c. 70m high west-facing cliff in central Oronsay.

The 360° panorama provided by the 72m OD summit of [Oronsay](#) is quite remarkable and well worth taking time to enjoy.

5. A dark, west-facing cliff composed of unstratified volcanoclastic sedimentary material, with obvious angular to rounded clasts. This accumulation may be interpreted as the product of contemporaneous weathering and

Excursion SW Skye 4: Oronsay, Loch Bracadale

Starting from the west, going in a clockwise direction:

West: [Wiay](#), due west in [Loch Bracadale](#), and [Macleod's Maidens](#) at [Idrigill Point](#) beyond, with the southern islands of the Outer Hebrides in the distance:



Figure SW Skye 4.12: South end of Wiay in Loch Bracadale from Oronsay. View is towards the west.



Figure SW Skye 4.13: The central part of Wiay and Idrigill Point and Macleod's Maidens, beyond. View is towards the west.

NW: [Macleod's Tables](#), [Healabhal Mhòr](#) and [Healabhal Bheag](#) on Duirinish – another example of Hebridean idiosyncrasy, with Mhòr (big) lower than Bheag (small), at 469m OD and 488m OD, respectively:



Figure SW Skye 4.14: Macleod's Tables, Healabhal Bheag (left) and Healabhal Mhòr (right) from Oronsay. View is towards the NW.

NNW: [Tarnar Island](#):



Figure SW Skye 4.15: Tarnar Island in Loch Bracadale from Oronsay. View is towards the NW.



Figure SW Skye 4.16: Detail of the southern end of Tarnar Island in Loch Bracadale from Oronsay. View is towards the NW.



Figure SW Skye 4.17: Detail of the southern end of Tarnar Island in Loch Bracadale from Oronsay. View is towards the NW.

East: [Ardtreck Point](#) at the mouth of [Loch Harport](#):



Figure SW Skye 4.18: Ardtreck Point on the south side of Loch Bracadale, with Gesto Bay, beyond, and Beinn Mheadhonach in the distance. View towards the NE.

SE: the NW side of Minginish, with the Cuillin Hills beyond:



Figure SW Skye 4.19: Snow-covered northern end of the Cuillin Hills from Oronsay. View towards the SE.

SSW: the vertical cliff of [Rubha nan Clach](#):



Figure SW Skye 4.20: Rubha nan Clach in NW Minginish. Note collapsed material at base of cliff. View is towards the SW.

Return to the parking area.

End of excursion.