

# North Skye 9:

## The Quiraing



The Quiraing (Gaelic A' Chuith Raing, the pillared enclosure; possibly Old Norse Kvi Rand, round fold) is a spectacular line of cliffs and associated landslipped blocks of Paleocene plateau lavas at the northern end of the inland escarpment on Trotternish. Included within the landslipped crags are spectacular landforms, The Prison, The Needle and The Table. The escarpment cliff reveals details of the thick sequence of lavas of the Beinn Edra Formation.

**Aspects covered:** Quaternary-Holocene landslips; Paleocene lavas; Paleocene dykes of the regional swarm.

### Routes:

(a) [Staffin-Uig road](#) – [base of crags below Creag Loisgte](#) – [The Prison](#) – [The Needle](#) – [The Table](#) – [Fir Bhreugach](#) – [Sròn Vourlinn](#) (-return [Staffin-Uig road](#) either by retracing route, or along the top of the escarpment);

(b) [Flodigarry](#) – [Loch Langaig](#) – [Loch Hasco](#) – [Leac nan Fionn](#) – [Fir Bhreugach](#) - [Sròn Vourlinn](#) – [Loch Droighinn](#) (-return [Flodigarry](#)).

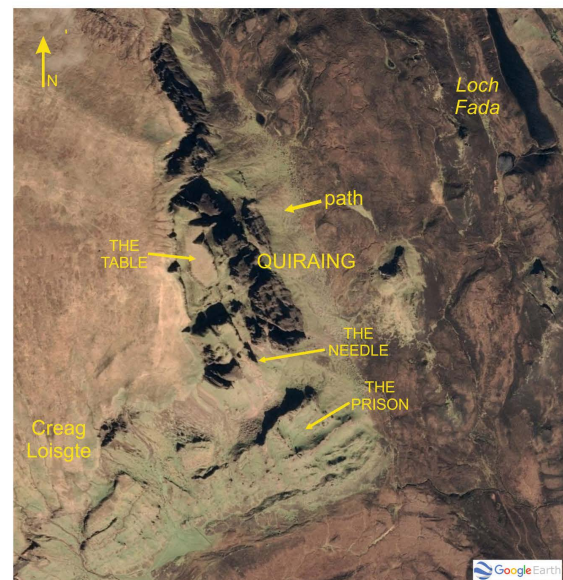
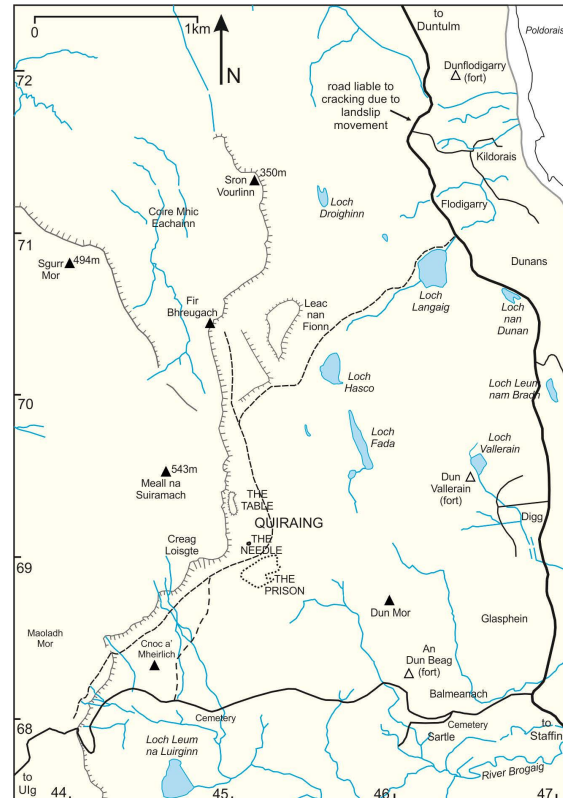
Two routes (a & b) are possible or can be combined if transport can be arranged at the parking area on the [Staffin-Uig road](#) and at [Flodigarry](#). Otherwise, route (a) requires the retracing of steps to the parking area. Route (b) has the advantage of being circular but misses out on the spectacular overview from the [Staffin-Uig road parking area](#). The combined (one way) route would involve (in either direction): [Staffin-Uig road](#) – [base of crags below Creag Loisgte](#) – [The Prison](#) – [The Needle](#) – [The Table](#) – [Fir Bhreugach](#) – [Sròn Vourlinn](#) - [Loch Droighinn](#) - [Flodigarry](#).

**Distance:** 8-10 kilometres.

**Time:** 8 hours.

**General comments:** A spectacular route along the Quiraing escarpment, taking in [The Prison](#), [The Needle](#) and [The Table](#). A very popular tourist attraction, especially from the viewpoint at the [parking area on the](#)

[Staffin-Uig road](#), leading to parking difficulties during the Summer months. The various route options are outlined, above. The paths are, in general, good, but can be slippery underfoot due to loose gravel when dry, and mud when wet. Good-weather conditions are essential as navigation in bad weather is difficult and dangerous.



**Figure North Skye 9.1:** Location map and annotated Google Earth® image of The Quiraing.

The details set out below are those involving a start point at the parking area on the [Staffin-Uig road](#).

From [Staffin](#), take the minor inland road, east from the [Brogaig road junction](#), towards [Uig](#) for 3km (2 miles). The

road is single track and, where the road goes through the escarpment, has two impressive hairpin bends requiring care. Cars going uphill have precedence over those going downhill. The [parking area](#) is just beyond (towards [Uig](#)) the upper hairpin bend. If busy, an alternative strategy is to return towards Staffin and [park near the cemetery](#) on the south side of the road, south of [Cnoc a' Mhèirlich](#), and access the base of the escarpment from the [path](#) that heads north from the north side of the road.



**Figure North Skye 9.2:** Advanced warning of the Staffin-Uig road gradient at the two hairpin bends, where it cuts through the escarpment.

From the viewpoint, the view north is spectacular.



**Figure North Skye 9.3:** Information board at the beginning of the path from the parking area on the Staffin-Uig road to The Quiraing.

The view to the south from the [high ground](#) east of the [parking area](#) is equally spectacular, across [Loch Cleat](#) to the 719m OD summit of [The Storr](#) in the distance.



**Figure North Skye 9.4:** View towards the south along the Trotternish escarpment. Nearby is Loch Cleat below the 336m OD summit, Cleat. The highest point on the escarpment, The Storr (719m OD), is in the far distance.

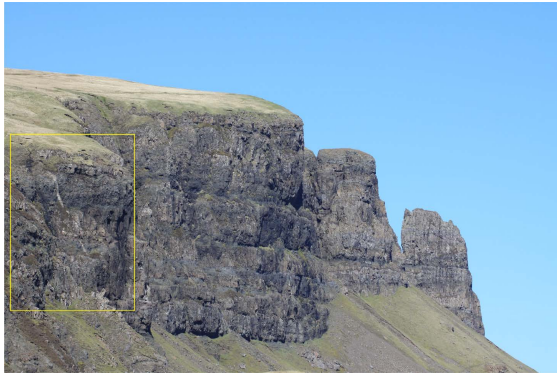
The landslipped character of the east side of the Trotternish escarpment, 36km (22 miles) long, runs from south of [The Storr](#), north to [Sròn Vourlinn](#), c. 4km north of this viewpoint (see below). In many respects the geological make-up of these precipitous cliffs is relatively simple, comprising a thick, laterally-variable sequence of Paleocene basaltic lavas of the Beinn Edra Formation. Both simple sheet lavas and more 'stratified' compound pahoehoe lavas are represented, some with distinctive reddened tops due to weathering events during hiatuses in the volcanism. Throughout this excursion these lavas are the dominant lithology and should be examined where possible. Uncommon near-vertical Paleocene basaltic dykes of the NW-SE -trending regional swarm intruded into the lava sequence are the only other bedrock lithology.

The view north displays the huge landslips that have developed towards the end of the Pleistocene Epoch and into the Holocene Epoch, as the ice sheets that covered much of Scotland retreated. The development of the landslips has occurred due to the nature of the subjacent Upper Jurassic strata: predominantly weakly lithified shales and claystones that have acted as a decollement 'surface.' Rotation, lateral sliding and toppling of blocks from the escarpment have taken place, facilitated by planes of weakness where dykes are emplaced into the lava sequence and where escarpment-parallel fractures and faults are present. Material towards the toe of the landslips, in the coastal area between [Flodigarry](#) and [Digg](#), preserve evidence of glacial moulding, suggesting pre-Holocene landslipped material.

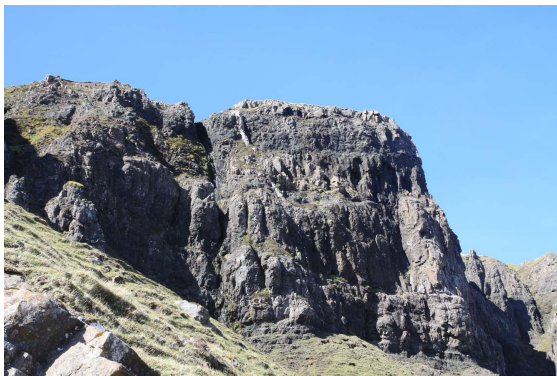
In this excursion, a route is outlined and illustrated. Throughout, the focus is on features within the lavas and on some of the beautifully exposed dykes, together with the gross features of the landslips. Specific 'localities' are not detailed, rather a commentary is provided for the route(s), with features of interest highlighted.

The route north from the parking area is accessed by crossing the road above the upper hairpin bend and heading NE. After c. 500m, the [path drops](#) from above the crag line, to below it: to the east is the hill, [Cnoc a' Mhèirloch](#). The path contours along the base of the

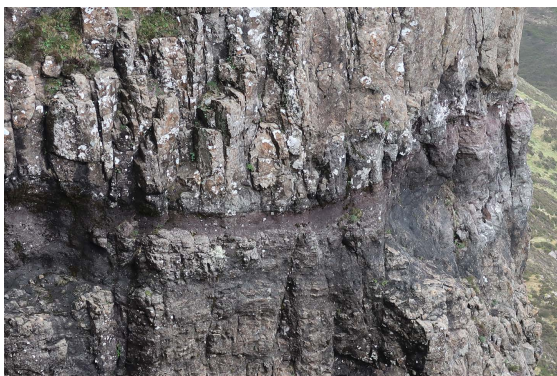
escarpment and minor streams are crossed. Below (SE of) [Creag Loisgte](#), the [lower path](#) that starts at the cemetery on the Staffin-Ulg road joins the main path.



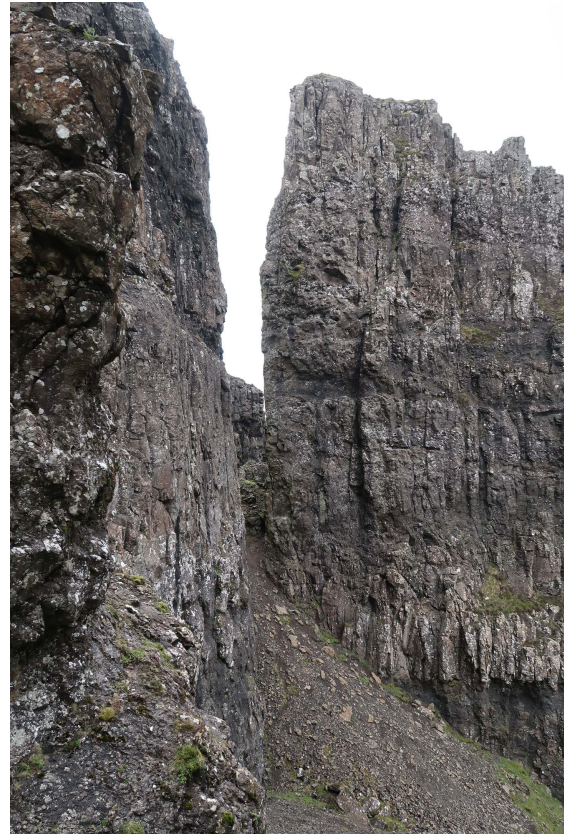
**Figure North Skye 9.5:** The main escarpment face below Creag Loisgte, with an uninterrupted view of the lava sequence. Outline box is area shown in Figure North Skye 9.6.



**Figure North Skye 9.6:** Detail of the lava sequence forming the main escarpment face below Creag Loisgte. Note prominent dyke, one of many that intrude the volcanic sequence of the Beinn Edra Formation.



**Figure North Skye 9.7:** An example two prismatic-jointed basaltic lavas; the lower lava has a distinctive weathered (reddened) top.



**Figure North Skye 9.8:** A thick sequence of basaltic lavas below the main crag line of the escarpment. The vertical gullies most likely are due to the inweathering of dolerite dykes.

The path continues between two of the named landmark features of The Quiraing: [The Prison](#) to the right (east) and [The Needle](#) to the left (west). Both are parts of landslipped blocks below the main escarpment. The wall-like character (when viewed from certain directions) of [The Prison](#) and the spire-like character of [The Needle](#) explain their names.



**Figure North Skye 9.9:** View towards the NW from the Staffin-Ulg road. Below the main escarpment are The Prison, The Needle and The Table (tucked in below the main escarpment and accessed via a steep-sided track within a gully in the labyrinth of fissures below the main escarpment).



**Figure North Skye 9.10:** The Prison viewed from the main path, towards the north.



**Figure North Skye 9.11:** The Needle viewed towards the NW from the main path.

To access The Table requires a moderate amount of scrambling in narrow steep gullies and should be omitted if not confident. There is a labyrinth of these accessible fissures that give access to the higher ground close to the main escarpment. If the weather is poor, especially with low visibility, this should not be attempted. Head upwards directly left of [The Needle](#) into the steep, narrow gully. After a moderate gain in height, [The Table](#) lies beyond, atop a flat buttress. Access to the (Table) top is by a path on its SW side.



**Figure North Skye 9.12:** The Table, below the main escarpment. View is towards the SE.

Return to the main path by the same route. Continue north along the main path, with views of the main

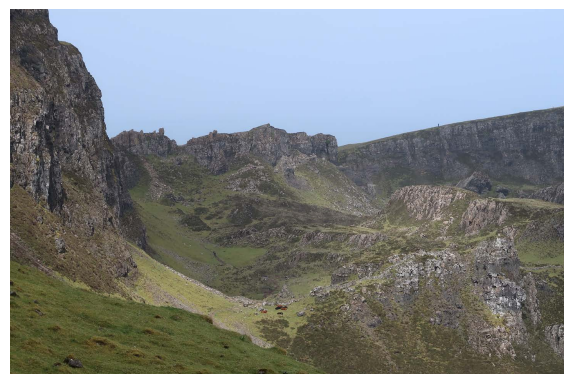
escarpment face and landslipped masses on your left (west).



**Figure North Skye 9.13:** View from a NE-SW -trending gully below the escarpment towards Loch Hasco and Loch Langaig, with Eilean Flodigarry in the distance.



**Figure North Skye 9.14:** Flat-topped landslipped block of Leac nan Fionn, east of Fir Bhreugach.



**Figure North Skye 9.15:** View towards the north, where the main path splits, with the left-hand branch continuing north below the escarpment and upwards towards a stone wall and thence through the escarpment at Fir Bhreugach. The right-hand branch heads NE between Leac nan Fionn and Loch Hasco, downwards to the road south of Flodigarry (where parking is available if the excursion starts here and takes the reverse of the route outlined here).

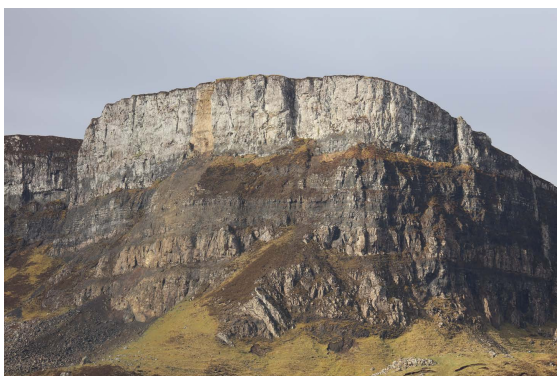


**Figure North Skye 9.16:** View towards the north from where the left-hand branch of the path, towards Fir Bhreugach, breaches a wall.

Continue uphill to the escarpment and onto the high ground beyond at Fir Bhreugach.



**Figure North Skye 9.17:** View towards the SE from the 380m OD point on the ridge between Fir Bhreugach and Sròn Vourlinn. Staffin Bay and Staffin Island are in the distance.



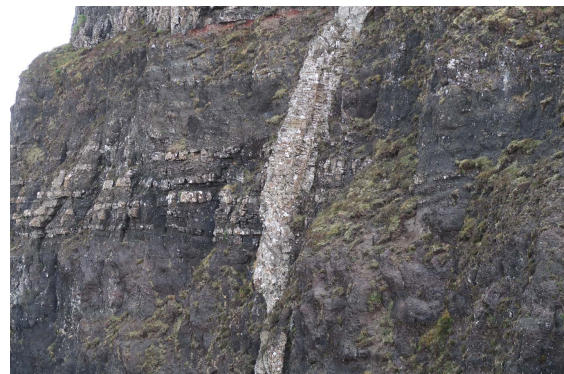
**Figure North Skye 9.18:** Sròn Vourlinn viewed from Flodigarry. The white lava face below the summit is due to staining caused by weathering. Where this is interrupted, the vertical face of these jointed lavas has given way and formed a covering of scree on the lower part of the escarpment. Note the landslipped block at the base of the crags, with lavas at an anomalously steep inclination.



**Figure North Skye 9.19:** The unstable face of Sròn Vourlinn where it has partially collapsed, exposing relatively fresh lava. Keep well away from this unstable edge.



**Figure North Skye 9.20:** The main lava face of Sròn Vourlinn, viewed towards the south, cut by a distinctive white-weathering dolerite dyke.



**Figure North Skye 9.21:** Detail of the dolerite dyke in the main lava face of Sròn Vourlinn, with horizontal columnar joints.



**Figure North Skye 9.22:** View NE towards Eilean Flodigarry. The inland body of water to the left is Loch Droighinn.

From [Sròn Vourlinn](#), either return to the [parking area on the Staffin-Uig road](#) along the top of the escarpment, passing [Meall na Suiramach](#) (543m OD), [Creag Loisgte](#) and [Maoladh Mòr](#), or continue NW to the end of the escarpment, descend carefully and turn right (east) where there is a stone wall and continue past [Loch Droighinn](#) to the [roadside parking area](#), north of [Loch Langaig](#) at [Flodigarry](#) (where the path to the escarpment starts, heading SW between [Leac nan Fionn](#) and [Loch Hasco](#)).



**Figure North Skye 9.23:** Loch Hasco, perched within the landslipped material below the main inland escarpment.

Although not a formal part of the excursion, the view north from Staffin illustrates well the chaotic nature of the landslipped area at the northern end of the Trotternish escarpment, as does the view towards the SW from Flodigarry.



**Figure North Skye 9.24:** Landslip terrain north of Staffin Bay, with the escarpment ridge of Sròn Vourlinn in the distance. View is towards the NW.



**Figure North Skye 9.25:** Landslip terrain SW of Flodigarry. View is towards the SW.

One piece of evidence that the landslips are still active is illustrated by the cracks that perennially open and require repair on the public road at Flodigarry.



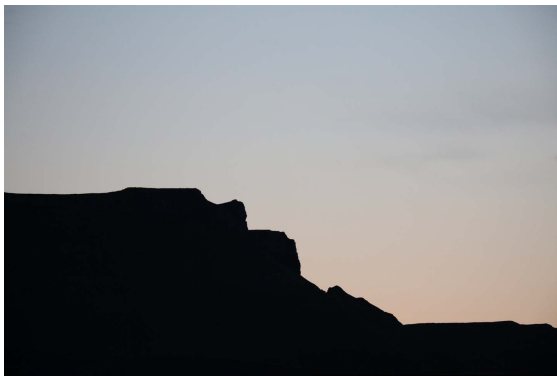
**Figure North Skye 9.26:** Fair warning about the nature of the public road at Flodigarry.



**Figure North Skye 9.27:** Tension gashes on the public road at Flodigarry due to landslip-induced movement.

Finally, the profile view (silhouette) of the northern end of Trotternish illustrates well the nature of the bedrock geology of the escarpment and the (geologically-) recent landslip development.

A beautiful view to end the day.



**Figure North Skye 9.28:** Profile of the northern end of the Trotternish escarpment, at Sròn Vourlinn.

End of Excursion.