

## West Skye 6:

### Macleod's Tables, Duirinish



*Macleod's Tables, Healabhal Mhòr (Macleod's Table North, 469m OD) and Healabhal Bheag (Macleod's Table South, 488m OD) in Duirinish, comprise Paleocene lavas of the Ramasaig Group of north Skye. In typical Hebridean idiosyncratic style, Beag (little) is higher than Mhòr (big).*

**Aspects covered:** Large-scale architecture of Paleocene basaltic-mugearitic plateau lavas; small-scale internal characteristics of the lavas; sedimentary units interbedded with the lavas.

**Route:** [Orbost](#) – [Ceall Bhuidhe](#) – [Cnoc Feannaig](#) – [An Cruachan](#) – [Healabhal Bheag \(Macleod's Table South\)](#) – [Beinn na h-Uamha](#) – [An Sgùrran](#) – [Healabhal Mhòr \(Macleod's Table North\)](#) – [Osdale River](#) (- return [Orbost](#)).

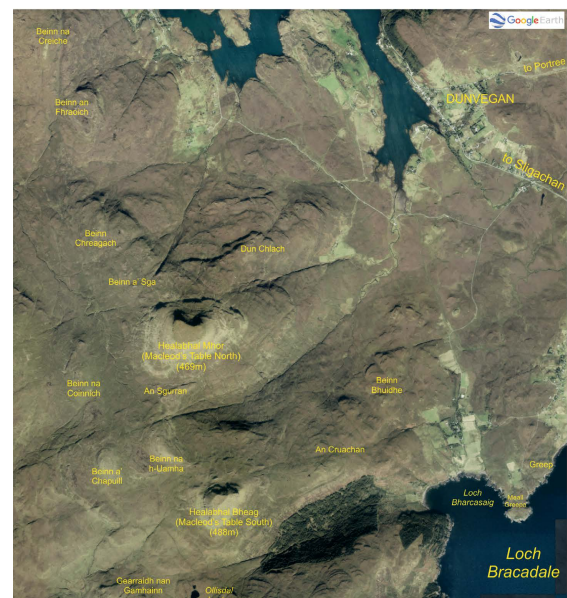
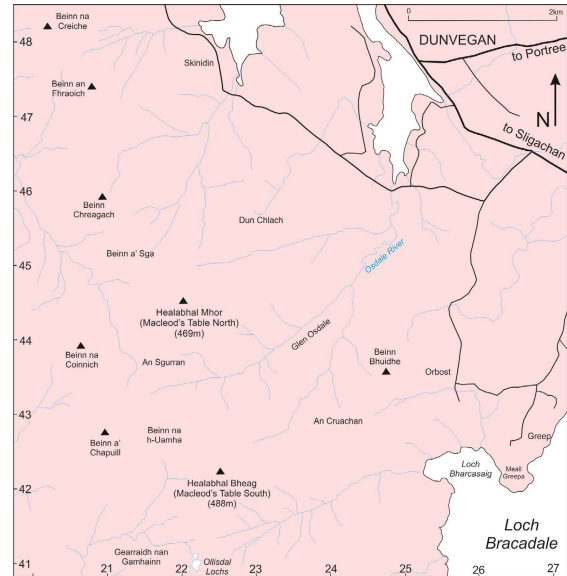
**Distance:** 10km (6 miles).

**Time:** 6-7 hours.

**General comments:** From [Dunvegan](#), take the A863 SE for c. 2km and then SW on the B884 for c. 1km to where a minor road, signposted [Orbost](#) continues south. Continue south on this road to the end of the public road at [Orbost](#). Parking is available at the end of the public road at [Orbost](#).

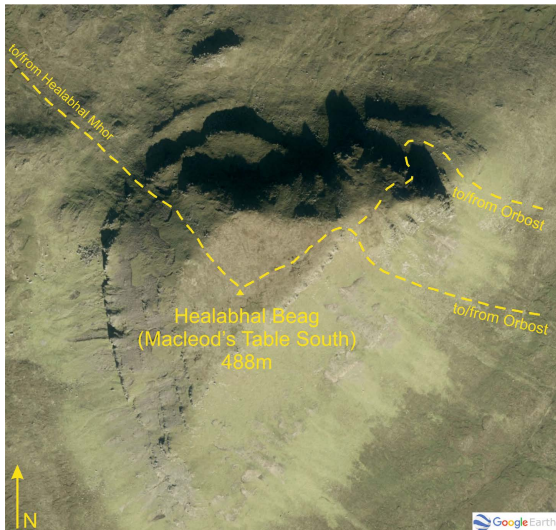
Two non-geological legends are associated with the flat summits of Macleod's Tables. The first is that when Saint Columba arrived on Skye, no bed was offered, and that divine action created for him a bed and a table. The second is that the Chief of Clan Macleod suffered taunts whilst attending a banquet in Edinburgh hosted by King James V. When these disrespectful dignitaries visited the chief at Dunvegan, he entertained them to his far larger table, Healabhal Mhòr, where he laid on a feast, with illumination provided by his clansmen bearing torches.

The more pedestrian geological explanation for the tabletop summits is that they are composed of Paleocene flat-lying, resistant-to-erosion mugearite lavas. You chose.



**Figure West Skye 6.1:** Map and annotated Google Earth® image of the Macleod's Table area, Duirinish.

From the parking area gain access to the open hillside to the west. There is no obvious route, so judgement on the day is required. The low ground towards [Healabhal Bheag](#) (Macleod's Table South) has no obvious path: head west, uphill, over [Ceall Bhuidhe](#) and [Cnoc Feannaig](#), to [An Cruachan](#). Continue SSW towards [Healabhal Bheag](#) (Macleod's Table South), where the obvious path can be picked up. The summit of [Healabhal Bheag](#) can be reached either from its NE side, following the path, craggy in places, or from its steep grassy SE side.



**Figure West Skye 6.2:** Annotated Google Earth® image of the Healabhal Bheag area, indicating suitable ascent/descend routes. These can vary depending upon the state of the ground.

The eastern end of [Healabhal Bheag](#) comprises near-vertical crags of prismatic-jointed basaltic lava. The typical terraced character of the inland exposures of the Skye Lava Field is absent. When seen viewed towards the south from [Healabhal Mhòr](#) (see below), this anomalously thick mass of lava may be interpreted as a ponded unit, filling a topographic low on the lava field at the time of eruption. Elsewhere on [Healabhal Bheag](#), the typical terraced character of the interbedded basalt, hawaiite, benmoreite and mugearite lavas is evident. Gain the [summit of the hill](#), with its 488m OD trigonometric pillar.



**Figure West Skye 6.3:** The craggy east face of Healabhal Bheag, composed of a thick interval of prismatic-jointed basalt lava, below which are thin sheets of lava with the more typical terraced appearance.



**Figure West Skye 6.4:** Detail of the craggy east face of Healabhal Bheag, composed of a continuous exposure of prismatic-jointed basalt lava.



**Figure West Skye 6.5:** The flat top of Healabhal Bheag with its 488m OD trigonometric pillar, viewed towards the NE.

The view from the summit of [Healabhal Bheag](#) shows well the terraced character of the lavas to the south: [Beinn Bhac-ghlais](#), and beyond to [Ben Cuidad](#) and [Ben Idrigill](#).



**Figure West Skye 6.6:** Terraced lavas forming Beinn Bhac-ghlais and, beyond, to Ben Idrigill, viewed towards the SE from Healabhal Bheag.

To the west, terraced [Beinn na h-Uamha](#) comprises similar lavas, over which is the route to [Healabhal Mhòr](#).



**Figure West Skye 6.7:** Beinn na h-Uamha viewed towards the NW from Healabhal Bheag. The obvious terraced NE side of the hill is the route around the head of Glen Osdale to Healabhal Mhòr.

The simpler terraced character of [Healabhal Mhòr](#) is evident and changes little as it is approached. [Glen Osdale](#) forms an obvious low between the two tables and will be crossed on the return journey to [Orbost](#).

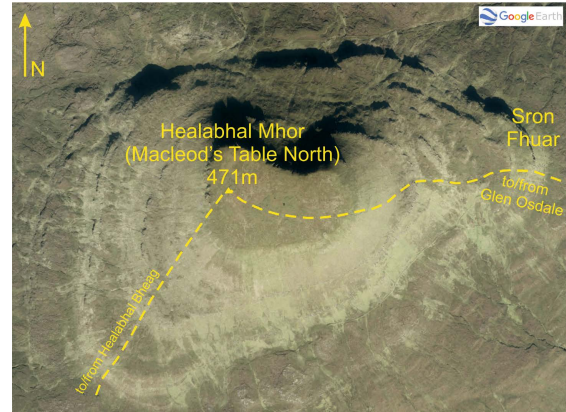


**Figure West Skye 6.8:** Healabhal Mhòr from the NE side of Beinn na h-Uamha.



**Figure West Skye 6.9:** Glen Osdale from the NE side of Beinn na h-Uamha.

Continue north from [Beinn na h-Uamha](#), across [An Sgùrran](#), and ascent the grassy SW slope of [Healabhal Mhòr](#) to its plateau summit and [cairn at 471m OD](#).

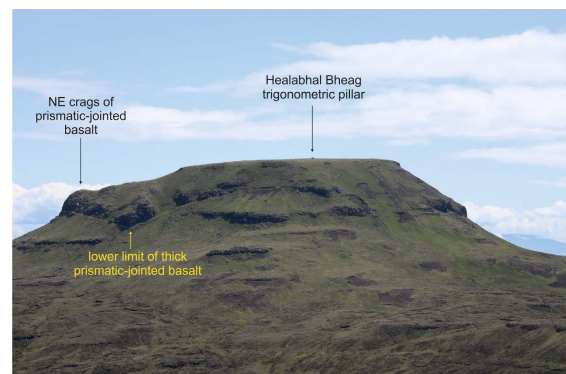


**Figure West Skye 6.10:** Annotated Google Earth® image of the Healabhal Mhòr area, indicating suitable ascent/descend routes. These can vary depending upon the state of the ground.

From the summit of [Healabhal Mhòr](#), devoid of rock exposure, there is an excellent view south to [Healabhal Bheag](#) that illustrates the possible complexities of the lava sequence on the latter: the thick prismatic unit at the NE (left) end of the hill may be the result of ponding of a flow in a topographic low of the lava field.



**Figure West Skye 6.11:** Healabhal Bheag viewed towards the south from the summit of Healabhal Mhòr.



**Figure West Skye 6.12:** Detail of Healabhal Bheag viewed towards the south from the summit of Healabhal Mhòr, indicating lower limit of the thick, prismatic-jointed basalt lava.

To the SE is [Loch Bracadale](#) with its attendant islands - [Wiay](#), [Harlosh Island](#) and [Tarnier Island](#) - with the Cuillin Hills in the distance.



**Figure West Skye 6.13:** Loch Bracadale and the Cuillin Hills from Healabhal Mhòr.

Descend the SE side of [Healabhal Mhòr](#) avoiding the obvious lava crags, many of which are of more evolved composition, hawaiite, benmoreite and mugearite, with a distinctive near-horizontal fabric due to feldspar alignment, and vertical prismatic joints. Continue SE towards the waterfall on the [Osdale River](#) in [Glen Osdale](#) at [\[NG 2315 4380\]](#).



**Figure West Skye 6.14:** Terraced crags of benmoreite and mugearite lavas on the SE side of Healabhal Mhòr.



**Figure West Skye 6.15:** Detail of terraced crags of prismatic-jointed benmoreite and mugearite lavas on the SE side of Healabhal Mhòr.



**Figure West Skye 6.16:** Detail of near-horizontal fabric in prismatic-jointed mugearite lava on the SE side of Healabhal Mhòr. Pole c. 1m long.

The sole [waterfall](#) in the upper reaches of the [Osdale River](#) marks the outcrop of a thick interval, up to 8m, of clastic sedimentary rocks, ranging between cobble conglomerate and shale, of fluvial association. The cobbles within these (river channel) conglomerates are of local lava field lithologies, basalt, hawaiite and mugearite, together with less abundant and more exotic material, including Late Proterozoic Torridonian gritty sandstone, Archean basement gneiss, Paleocene granite and porphyritic felsite, interpreted to have been derived from outwith the lava field, most likely the Paleocene Rum Central Complex, to the south, which had been unroofed prior to the development of the Skye Lava Field. Within the fine-grained more fissile (overbank, floodplain) units, shales and siltstones, have good leaf imprints, *Quercus* (oak), *Corylus* (hazel) and *Platanus* (plane).



**Figure West Skye 6.17:** Waterfall on the Osdale River marking the location of the sedimentary interval that separates the underlying Ramasaig Formation from the overlying Osdale Formation.



**Figure West Skye 6.18:** Clastic sedimentary sequence (at level of waterfall) interbedded with the lava sequence exposed in the Osdale River. Pole is c. 1m long.



**Figure West Skye 6.19:** Sandstones within the clastic sedimentary sequence interbedded with the lava sequence exposed in the Osdale River. Pole c. 1m long.



**Figure West Skye 6.20:** Cobble conglomerate within the clastic sedimentary sequence interbedded with the lava sequence exposed in the Osdale River, with obvious fragments of Torridonian gritty sandstone and local lava field lithologies. Coin c. 24mm across.

Exit [Glen Osdale](#) and head east towards the public road, keeping to the south of [Creagan Dearga](#) and [Creagan Bàn](#). Continue south along the public road to [Orbost](#).

End of excursion.