

In brief

Category: moderate walk

Walking Distance: 8.5km / 5.25 miles

Time: allow three hours

Map Reference: OS Landranger 31
and Pathfinder NF71 / 81 / NF60 / 70

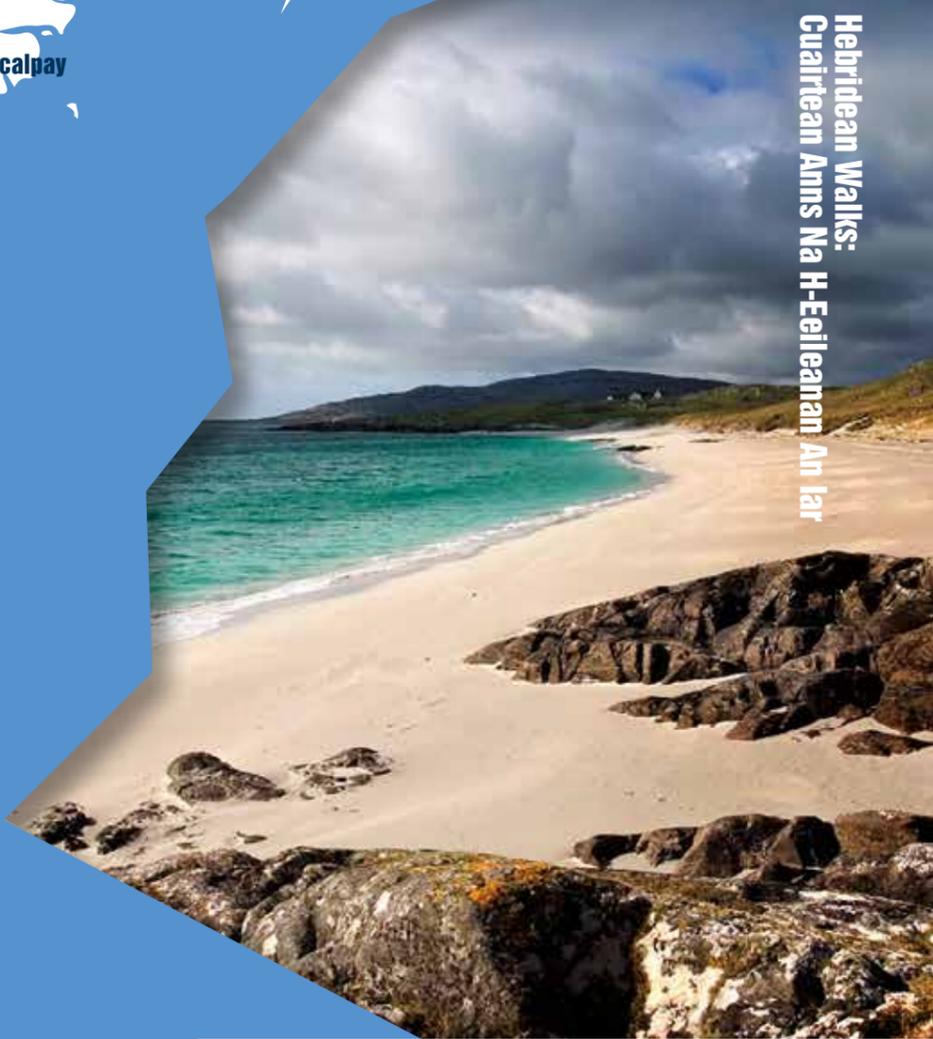
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OUTER
HEBRIDES



Eriskay



Explore the rest of our Hebridean Walks!

How to get there?

Eriskay is now linked to South Uist by means of a long causeway. However if you are travelling from the Isle of Barra you will still require to use the ferry service between Ardmhor and Coilleag. Details of connecting local buses from Lochmaddy, Daliburgh and Castlebay available from the local Tourist Information Centres.

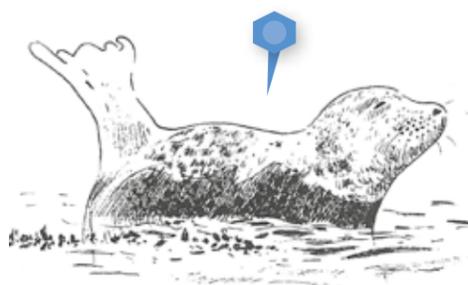
Follow the Crofting Code

- Please leave dogs behind, or ensure they are on a leash as they can be a danger to livestock.
- Park your car without blocking access for other vehicles.
- Please fasten gates.
- Leave no litter.
- Do not disturb breeding birds.
- Protect wildlife and plants.
- Avoid damaging archaeological sites.

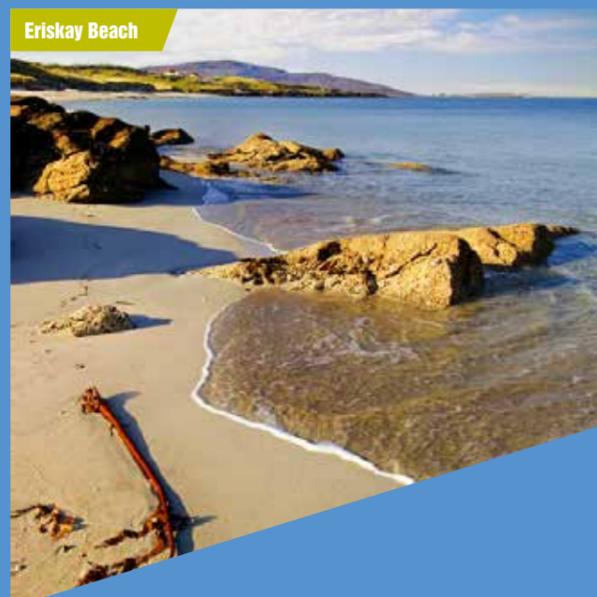
For your safety

- Remember the weather here can be unpredictable!
- Wear sensible clothing and footwear.
- Take an OS map and a compass.
- Tell someone where you are going or leave a note visible on the dashboard of your car – stating your destination and estimated time of return.

“The harbour at Acarsaid is a favourite refuge for yachts throughout the spring / summer season.”



Common seal



Eriskay Beach

Explore...

If travelling from South Uist, when you reach the end of the causeway turn to the right and continue along the main road up the hill, past the crossroads at Rubha Ban, down past 'Am Politician', past the cemetery and on to the old cemetery. There you can see the grave of Father Allan Macdonald.

Continue along the track and shore until you reach Coilleag a' Phrionnsa, the beach where Bonnie Prince Charlie first stepped ashore in Scotland. Walk right along to the other end of the beach, walk up the footpath at the end of the beach, which will take you up to the main road. Turn left and walk up to the junction. At the junction, turn right towards Acarsaid. Follow the road right along round a sharp bend which will take you past Acarsaid Harbour.

When you reach the trees you should follow the rock face uphill for a panoramic view of the islands of Skye, Soay, Canna, Eigg and Muck and on a clear day, Mull, Tiree and Coll. Retrace your steps to the trees and continue along the track to the right. At the end of the track, follow the way markers across a stile, along the shore and up the hill fence until you see a lily covered loch hidden away in a small dip. Nearby at the end of the walk is a secluded little bay where you might catch sight of otters.

Retrace your steps back to the main road, along past the letterbox and keep going until you see a track with a gate going off to the right. Follow the track on the short climb up to Loch Crakavaig, past the water station.

Head north from the loch to get to the road again. On your approach enjoy a spectacular view of Eriskay and the archipelago North and South. Return to the right back along the main road, passing on your way, The Statue of Our Lady of Fatima, erected on the site of the original Catholic church of Eriskay.

S.S Politician

Past the crossroads at Rubha Ban, on your right, you will see the local pub 'Am Politician', named after the S.S Politician. Referred to locally as the 'Polly' the 8,000 ton cargo ship S.S Politician ran aground in the Sound of Eriskay.

Her cargo was general consisting of, for example, tobacco, cigarettes, building bricks, shoes, bales of cloth, etc, but causing the most excitement was the contents of Number Five hold - 22,000 cases of whisky! It was February 1941, the difficult years of World War 2 and life was hard. Goods were hard to come by in the island and none more so than whisky.

To the people of Eriskay and the surrounding islands the 'Polly' was a Godsend. They raided, they plundered and as one can imagine, they had a jolly good time. Some of the events which followed the grounding of the 'Polly' inspired

Compton Mackenzie's famous novel (and subsequent film) Whisky Galore. Inside the pub there is information and memorabilia commemorating this event.



Bell from battleship 'Derlinger' scuttled in Scarpa Flow in 1919

Loch Crakavaig

Loch Crakavaig is the source of Eriskay's fresh water supply. In this area keep an eye out for a glimpse of the rare Eriskay ponies. These ponies, Scotland's native horse can be traced unchanged throughout history.

They are undoubtedly the kind of mount used by the Picts in the battle of Nechtansmere and by King Robert the Bruce at Bannockburn.



Now numbering less than 300 in the United Kingdom (and of these only around 20 in Eriskay) they are recognised as endangered and registered as such by the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. The society for the Preservation and Development of the Eriskay Pony (now Comann Each nan Eilean - The Eriskay Pony Society) was founded in 1972 to save the breed from extinction. The ponies are very amenable, docile and intelligent and because of their hardiness relatively easy to keep especially in their natural habitat.

Father Allan Macdonald

Go past the new cemetery to visit the old one beyond. Along the right-hand wall is the grave of Father Allan Macdonald, a man remarkable for his time. Originally from Lochaber, he came to Eriskay in 1894.

Whilst here he built St Michaels Church, in its elevated position overlooking almost all of the parish to replace the existing thatched building which the islanders had used for worship since 1852.

Father Allan is however better remembered as a poet, bard and a Gaelic scholar, making important collections

of folktales and producing a dictionary of Gaelic words from South Uist and Eriskay.

He was the inspiration of many a Gaelic scholar at the time. He died and was buried in Eriskay in 1905 aged only 46.



Coilleag a' Phrionnsa

Follow the track from the old graveyard and you will come to Coilleag a' Phrionnsa, the Prince's Strand. Here it was on July 23rd 1745 that Charles Edward Stuart (Bonnie Prince Charlie) arrived in his sloop 'Le Du Teillay' to begin the great Jacobite Rising of 1745-46 which although initially successful was to end in the disastrous massacre on Culloden Moor.

Walk about three quarters of the way along the beach to Sgeir na h-Airidh Samhraidh,

the small outcrop of rocks on the shore, where the Prince is reputed to have stepped ashore on Scottish soil. Directly up from these rocks, on top of the dune, is the cairn erected by the schoolchildren of Eriskay to mark the spot. Look out for the pink convolvulus said to have grown from seeds gathered by Charles while he was waiting on the French coast and which subsequently dropped from his pocket on his arrival in Eriskay. The flowers are usually in bloom in July / August. Look out for the Bonnie Prince Charlie trail leaflets or check <http://www.bonnieprincecharlietrail.co.uk>

Acarsaid

When you reach the trees you should notice the paintings depicting the Way of the Cross on the rock face, they were painted in 1970 by the parish priest at the time Father Calum Macneill on slates taken from the Parish Church, St Michaels when it was re-slatted. Father Calum also restored the old stone cottage up to the slope, near the 14th station (now in disrepair) to use for the occasional religious service, thereby saving the islanders at this end of the island a long walk to St Michaels in Rubha Ban! The trees (rare in Eriskay!) were also planted as part of this scheme. The service of The Stations of the Cross is still held here annually, during lent.

From the 14th Station retrace your steps and continue along the track to the right. Off the road, on your left, a strange rock formation (some 12m long) is indicated by a waymarker.

Some people think this resembles a huge fossil, although no dinosaur fossils have been identified from the Western Isles. Have a look for yourself and decide whether dinosaurs roamed Eriskay.



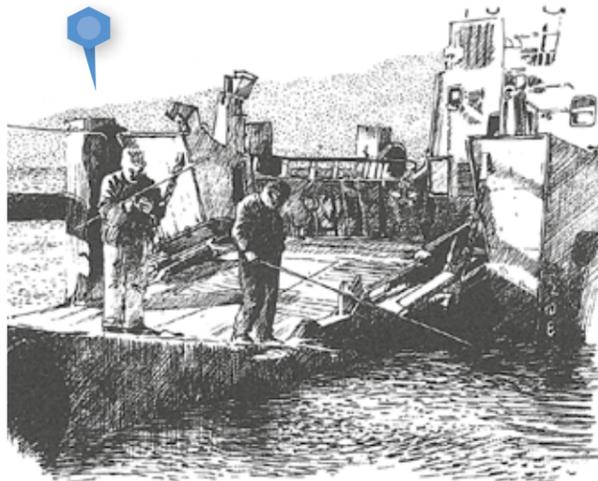
10th Station of the Cross (Jesus is stripped of his garments)

Eriskay Community

The islands description as 'The Island of Youth' could be taken as quite appropriate. From a population of around 150 less than 19% is over 65 and 25% are under 18 years of age. The gatherings in the local community centre are evidence of a lively vibrant community! In the summer, refreshments are available at the Community Centre and sometimes exhibitions are presented there. Meals are also served at 'Am Politician'.

The local shop, Co-Chomunn Eirisgeidh, Eiskay Community Co-op, was opened in 1981 and provides an outlet for, along with the usual groceries and hardware, the locally knitted Eriskay Jersey. The patterns on the jersey depict the fishing way of life on Eriskay.

Fishing is still the mainstay of the Island with boats working out of both Haun and the bigger harbour at Acarsaid. Most of the shellfish caught around these shores is now consigned to the Continental market, notably Spain. The harbour at Acarsaid is also a favourite refuge for yachts throughout the spring / summer season.



Fishing for Cud

Haun

Prior to the building of the causeway, both the car ferry from South Uist and the passenger ferry from Barra and South Uist arrived at and departed from Haun. Now all fishing boats go out from Acarsaid Harbour.

The old car ferry was called 'Eilean na h-Oige' -

'The Island of Youth'. This was the name of a poem written by Father Allan MacDonal in praise of Eriskay.

Now the car ferry runs from Coilleag, the ferry is a great place to keep a lookout for the delightful variety of seabirds, seals and dolphins which frequent the local waters.

