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# Excursions

## Introduction

Excursions to see the geology will naturally depend on the time available, the weather and the dedication of the visitor in reaching the more-remote localities. Wherever you go, granted clear weather, the views are superb, and ever changing; it is astonishing how much variety a small island affords. Eigg's central position in the Inner Hebrides means that the mainland, Rum or Skye are always in view.

Spring is often the best time to visit Eigg. The island is festooned with flowers: successively celandines, violets, primroses, wood anemones, wild garlic, bluebells, early purple and other orchids, marsh marigolds, foxgloves and yellow flag irises, to mention just the most conspicuous. The midges have not yet emerged. The bracken is down, or just unfurling; what a difference that makes!

## Safety

On a small island, distances are never great, but the going can be rough; paths are not always available (but see below), heather-covered moors are hard on the ankles, and in late summer bracken can be head-high, hiding slippery boulders beneath its fronds. Pebbles on the shore are unstable and slippery, so are algae-covered surfaces of in-situ rock exposures. Cliffs are an obvious hazard; one can often hear rocks falling even on still summer days. Tell somebody where you are going, be careful, use your common sense, carry a map, a compass and a first-aid kit and know how to use them. But don't be put off; your predecessors weren't, and few suffered anything more serious than a soaking and the attentions of midges.

## Conservation

The golden rule is to leave the island's environment as attractive as you found it; do not compromise the enjoyment of your successors. For geologists, this means, besides obeying the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, avoiding indiscriminate and unsightly hammering of rock exposures. Eigg has three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), including the coastal strip from Laig around the north of the island to Kildonnan (Excursions 2, 5 and 6). Collect specimens, if you need to, only from loose material, which is generally abundant. Fresh falls of rock often yield new finds of both fossils in sedimentary rocks (follow the Scottish Fossil Code) and zeolites in basalts. The soft mudstones of parts of the Jurassic succession yield fossils, but they are fragile, and serious collecting is best left to specialists. It is possible to find loose blocks of Hugh Miller's Reptile Bed on the north and east coasts and it is worth examining these for plesiosaur bones, although others have searched hard already. Significant finds, for instance of articulated limb bones or pieces of skull, should be reported to the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage.

## Layout of the excursions

There is a good network of marked paths on Eigg, shown on the route maps at the back of this guide and indicated on the ground by coloured circles painted on rocks or fences. The route maps can also be purchased from the craft shop as a pack of postcards with an accompanying guide, which draws attention to topographic, historical and archaeological features.

The An Laimhrig pier centre, containing the island shop, café and the craft shop is the obvious starting point for the walks. Many visiting naturalists stay at Glebe Barn so it is mentioned as an alternative start.

The first four excursions introduce the visitor to the main features of the geology and landscapes of the island. They include or can be combined with points of interest that many visitors to the island will want to see, such as St Donnan's Church, the Massacre Cave and the Singing Sands. The more strenuous extensions are for people with a greater interest

in geology, as are excursions 5–7. Page numbers given in brackets refer to the first section of this guidebook, where further information and, in some cases, a photograph relevant to the excursion, can be found.

## **Excursions**

[Excursion 1 Laig Bay and the Singing Sands](#)

[Excursion 2 The south coast caves and Grulin](#)

[Excursion 3 Kildonnan](#)

[Excursion 4 The Sgurr of Eigg](#)

## **Excursions 5 & 6 North and east coastline**

[Excursion 5: Eilean Thuilm and Sgor Sgaileach — reptile bones and a columnar sill \(Route map 5\)](#)

[Excursion 6: The east coast: basalt columns, fossils and landslips \(No route map\)](#)

[Excursion 7 Laig Gorge and Clach Alasdair](#)