Photo © Russell Sherwood

Enjoy Scotland's outdoors responsibly

Meal is thoir spèis do bhlàr a-muigh na h-Alba

Everyone has the right to be on most land and inland water providing they act responsibly. Your access rights and responsibilities are explained fully in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

The main messages from SOAC are:

- **Take responsibility for your own actions;**
- **Respect the interests of other people;**
- **Care for the environment.**

Livestock will be encountered at all times of the year. Wild flora and fauna are also in abundance and need to be respected and protected. Please keep dogs on lead or under strict control at all times, keep a safe distance from livestock and remove and dispose of dog waste responsibly.

Leave No Trace

Na Fàg Fianais

To leave no trace means exactly that.

Carry out what you carry in

Leave no trace of your visit and do not leave litter

Refrain from lighting camp fires

If going to a remote location make sure to pack your toilet kit and make sure you are well away from running water or footpaths

Extinguish and dispose of cigarette ends responsibly

SCOTTISH OUTDOOR ACCESS CODE

KNOW THE CODE BEFORE YOU GO

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JTCP/105866/Nov13

Flora and Fauna of Dunvegan

Planntraisean is Ainmhidhean Dhùn Bheagain

From the sea lochs to the tops of MacLeod's Tables, this area holds a great variety of wildlife. Some of Skye's iconic wildlife is found here. Look up to the sky for the glimpse of a golden eagle or one of the huge white-tailed eagles. You may even be lucky enough on scanning the shore line to see a camouflaged otter feeding on a crab.

The sea lochs in the area are a Special Area of Conservation because of the common (harbour) seal population. Look out for the seal pups during June but be careful not to disturb them.

So-called coral beaches in the area actually get their white appearance from broken dead pieces of maerl, a hard algae. The live maerl beds below the water are an important refuge for other sea life.

Gannets and black guillemots are just a couple of examples of seabirds you might spot on looking out to sea. Larger creatures such as dolphins or basking sharks are also possible to see.

The Two Churches walk at Dunvegan is a good place to view life in detail. Plants such as the fragrant bog myrtle or bell heather grow in abundance and rowan, hazel and birch trees can all be seen as well as an abundance of lichen.

There is always something to see here whether it's a buzzard cruising by or a lonely heron fishing on the shore, wild orchids at the side of a path or fungi in among the trees. If you time your visit correctly you will be met with an incredible show of blue bells.

Moonwort (Botrychium lunaria)
Photo © Carl Farmer

In addition to the great biodiversity there is fantastic geology to view around Dunvegan. The area is made up of basalt lavas which have shaped the flat topped hills and natural volcanic dykes can be seen cutting through the landscape . At MacLeod's Maidens you can witness how the sea has carved the basalt to create these magnificent sea stacks.

Paths Around DUNVEGAN

Ceuman mu DHÙN BHEAGAIN

MacLeod's Tables from above Dunvegan
Photo © Alastair Jackson

www.facebook.com/DunveganSkye
www.highland.gov.uk/countrysideaccess

Paths around DUNVEGAN - Ceuman mu DHÙN BHEAGAIN

1. Coral Beaches, Claigan near Dunvegan

Tràighean Corail, An Claigeann faisg air Dùn Bheagain

Grade: Easy **Distance:** 4kms
Grid Reference: NG 231 537 **Time:** 1-2 hours

Take the minor road after Dunvegan castle and keep going all the way to the end at Claigan; there you will find a car park. At the end, beside a gate there is a notice board explaining about the Coral Beaches and their walks. Apprised of what's ahead, go through the gate* and follow the track across a boggy area on stepping stones and then down to the coastline.

Continue straight ahead across the grass towards a gap in a dry stone wall, ford the stream on stones and, once atop a slight rise, the true Coral Beaches are revealed in all their beauty ahead of you. Simply continue along on sand that close inspection reveals to be made from a seaweed known as maerl. The island just offshore to the left is Lampay and the larger one straight ahead is Isay. And so on to the end of the sands.

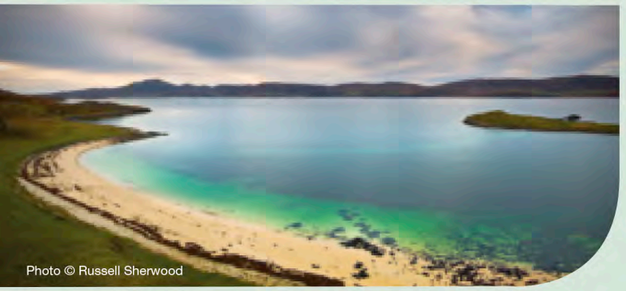
Photo © Russell Sherwood

The return is by the same route, although you would be rewarded by a short ascent to a little flat-topped hill that offers extensive views over the beach from Stein in Waternish right the way round to Dunvegan Head.

2. Dun Fiadhairt

Dùn Fiadhairt

Grade: Moderate **Distance:** Short 3km
Grid Reference: NG 239 508 **Time:** 1 - 2 hours

A short walk onto the little frequented Fiadhairt peninsula, visiting the remains of an iron-age broch. The route is on mainly grass and rougher moorland and the path is unclear in places.

As the route crosses working croftland with livestock, both sheep and cattle, it is best to keep dogs on a lead.

Park on the Claigan road two kilometres beyond Dunvegan Castle; the best place is on the right hand side just before the road crosses a causeway between two small, reedy lochs. Walk across the causeway, turning left immediately afterwards on a track and passing over a gate. Beyond, bearing slightly left are two small grassy hills Walk through the valley between them. As Loch Dunvegan comes into view, with Dunvegan castle prominent over to the left, follow a clear sheep path round the hill to the right. This soon has a track forking left down to the narrow neck of land (see photo) at An Dubh-Aird, where seaweed filled inlets almost meet. Cross the neck, and follow a path just above the wall by the left hand inlet. This sheep path slowly slopes uphill to cross a low ridge, with a more open view ahead.

Photo © Russell Sherwood

The tumbledown ruins of Dun Fiadhart - the remains of an iron-age broch or defensive refuge - are worth the short detour. Afterwards, head south for the sheltered shores of Loch Dunvegan on the south side of the Fiadhairt peninsula. These shores are much favoured by the Loch Dunvegan common seal colony, which is the largest on Skye.

The seals can often be seen basking on the rocks either on shore or just out in the sea. Approach very quietly, taking care not to disturb the seals too much. There are usually many of them swimming in the water; when in the water, the seals are much more confident and often swim quite close, seemingly as inquisitive as their human visitors. The return is by the same route. Once across the narrow neck of land, the track contouring the hill round to the left can be followed back to the start to give some variation.

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3. Two Churches Walk

Cuairt an Dà Eaglais

Grade: Easy **Distance: 3kms.**
Grid Reference: NG 250 480 **Time: 45mins-1 hour.**

It's permitted to park at the Duirinish Church of Scotland in Dunvegan village on the way to the castle. The walk starts though a gate in the wall to the left of the church as you look at it. The route begins, climbing gently through dense forestry plantation until the path narrows and enters mixed and open woodland. Here there is a mixture of wild flowers in spring and summer and the views all around are excellent.

At the T junction turn right and head uphill. The path climbs up to the edge of the woods and, passing through a gate, doubles back onto open moor. Then it descends to another gate through which there's a prominent standing stone on a low hill above the village, accessible across a field. (It is not pre-historic: Fifteen feet high and weighing in at 5 tons, it was erected, manually, by the villagers on midsummer's day, 2000!)

Now back on the main path, the route quickly descends to the ruined St Mary's Church which dates from before the Reformation. Turn right on the road and cross over to the pavement, then follow back to the start.

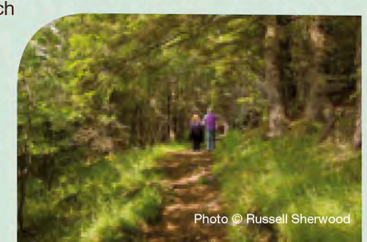
Photo © Russell Sherwood

4. Harlosh Point

Rubha Heàrrlois

Grade: Easy **Distance:** South Loop: 2kms, 1-1.5 hours
Grid Reference: NG 286 414
Long Loop: 6kms, 2-3 hours
Circuit: 8kms, 3-4 hours

The Harlosh Peninsula is accessed from the A863 south of Dunvegan by following the signs to Harlosh. This is a loop road with obvious access to the shoreline and Camas Bàn approximately half way round the loop at the bus shelter crossroads. The best parking for the walk is at Camas Bàn. Please ensure your car is parked off the road and not obstructing access to the shoreline track or the slipway.

Photo © Russell Sherwood

The route can be described as two short walks that can be combined to create a longer 'figure of 8' circuit with a mid-point return to the parking at Camas Ban.

The South Loop (2 km):

From the parking at Camas Bàn, (facing the sea - head left) continue along the tarmac road, initially quite steep for a short distance, and follow this until the tarmac gives way to an un-made track. At this point turn immediately right passing a large green shed on your left to pick up an obvious grassy path.

This path ascends a gentle rise and leads to a gate. Pass through, closing the gate behind you, and continue straight on. The route takes the walker out onto Harlosh Point, mainly on easy grassland tracks, and explores the coastline scenery around the point and gives stunning views of the Cuillin Hills and Harlosh and Tarner islands.

A sea stack can be found at the end of the point, from here continue round the end of the headland.

There are various easy ways back to the gate by following the rocky shoreline or by using the numerous sheep tracks along the headland. Along this stretch there are numerous easily accessed coves and sea inlets to be explored. Return from the gate to the parking by the inward route.

Points of interest on this loop are the memorial stones dedicated to members of the MacPhee family who drowned off the point (not easy to find but located in a small cove at the end of the point) and the remains of old dwellings and a chapel. Seals, sea-birds and potentially otters can be observed. Mainly flat easy walking.

You can make a full circuit by heading North from Camus Bàn to Vatten along the tarmac road, then at the finger post way-marker indicating right, head towards Feorlig across easy moorland path. Reaching made-up road again, turn right and head back along the road to your start point.

5. MacLeod's Maidens
Maighdeannan MhicLeòid

Grade: Moderate **Distance:** 17kms
Grid Reference: NG 257 432 **Time:** 5-6 hours

A group of impressive sea stacks, MacLeod's Maidens at Idrigill Point present a fairly strenuous walk along generally good paths until the final stage near the Maidens which is crisscrossed by multiple sheep tracks. Care should be taken near the cliff edges.

Access is via the B884 out of Lonmore, before Dunvegan, towards Glendale, going straight on to Orbost at the turn-off on the first bend. Follow the road to Orbost Farm, just before Orbost House, where it is possible to park. Walk along the track which quickly leads you to the shores of Loch Bharcasaig. Continue along the path and round to two houses in a forest clearing. Keep on the left-hand track which crosses a stream and heads on deeper into the forest.

Photo © Russell Sherwood

Two kilometres further on, the track crosses the Forse burn and passes through a gate after which a waymarker indicates a clear path away to the right; follow this rather than the track. Although boggy in places, the path climbs over a low pass affording good views over the loch towards the windfarm on Ben Aketil. The descent leads you to another gate and into 'Rebel's Wood'.

Continue along the path which eventually crosses a feeder and then the Idrigill burn. Just past the burn are the ruins of Idrigill, a once substantial village, and thence the path leads clearly up the right side of Glac Ghealairidh, a valley leading to a low pass. At the top of Glac Ghealairidh the route becomes indistinct but takes you SSW to the coast at Geòdha nan Daoine, an inlet. Turn right here and keep above the upper level of the cliffs to the next headland.

From this vantage point you can wonder at the mighty sea-stacks known as MacLeod's Maidens: The Mother and two Daughters. The easiest way back is to retrace your steps to Orbost. Return via the incoming route.

6. MacLeod's Tables
Healabhal Mhòr agus Healabhal Bheag

Grade: Strenuous **Distance:** 11 kms
Grid Reference: NG 256 445 **Time:** 4-6 hours

Respectively Healabhal Bheag and Healabhal Mhòr, MacLeod's Tables are two curiously flat-topped hills which can be seen from many parts of Skye. Their ascent is a rigorous one involving rough moorland, deep heather and a steep climb on grass and scree. The walk demands a good level of fitness and keen navigational skills. A good ordnance survey map, compass and GPS are essential items of equipment. The terrain is rough and weather changes can be sudden resulting in low lying mist. All normal mountain safety guidelines apply.

Access to the hills is via the B884 Glendale road, via a left turn from the church at Lonmore , just before Dunvegan, passing the fire station and garage and along the Orbost road which is a turn straight on at the first corner where the road swings sharp right.

The walk starts about 1km from the turn off from the Glendale road along the far bank of a little stream, just before the second bend on the road. Access through the deer fence is by a gate on the right. The path initially heads west, following along the edge of a ravine and then rising to head southwest then south to Beinn Bhuide. It then leads you across the moor, keeping to the height of the land to An Cruachan and eventually the way ahead to the top of Healabhal Bheag becomes clear, although the summit looks more like a cone than a table from this angle!

Continue across the moor towards drier but increasingly steep, grassy slopes. Head right on an eroded path which bypasses the cliffs and soon zig-zags up broken ground which eventually becomes a scree path leading to a grassy ridge and thus easily on up to the rim of the plateau and to magnificent 360° views.

Head northwest across the plateau for the descent and then down the steep grass slope. To continue to Healabhal Mhòr, follow the shelf to the right and then down the slope to the beginning of a steep climb to the second table. The start of the plateau is surprisingly boggy but continue nonetheless to the far side of the plateau with its beautiful vista over Loch Dunvegan.

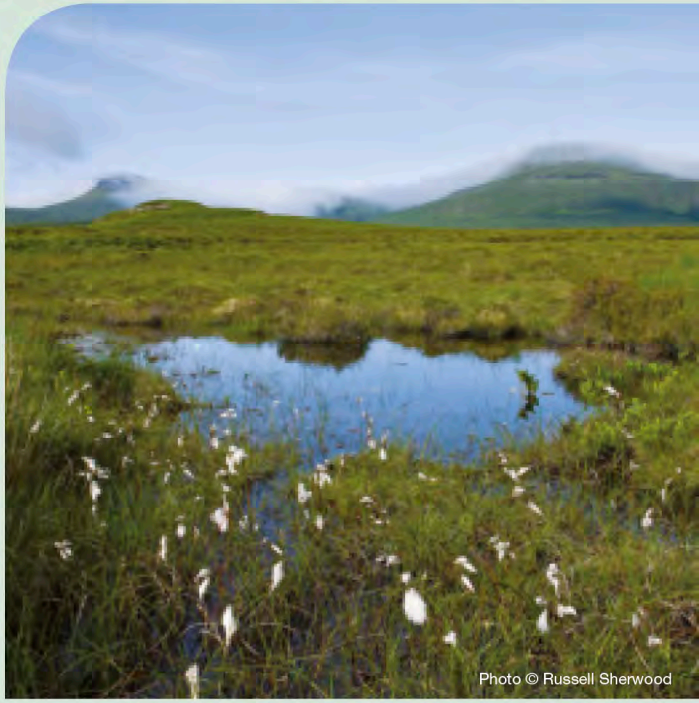
Photo © Russell Sherwood

The final descent is another steep, mainly grassy slope. When the ground levels head southeast down to Osdale River and cross where you can before heading cross country to the shallow pass, which needs careful navigation, and brings you onto to your outward journey, passing the ravine which leads you back down to the road.

A shorter alternative direct route to the summit of Healabhal Mhòr, can be taken via Osdale Burn. From the bend at the Orbost turning continue towards Colbost for approximately 1 mile until a track sign posted 'Osdale Farmhouse and Byre, is seen on the left. The walk starts along the track to the farmhouse and beyond the buildings follows the right bank of the ravine of Osdale Burn in a westerly direction. Beyond the ravine strike south of west heading up the steep flanks of Healabhal Mhòr to the summit. The route is steep and trackless on rough grass between rocky outcrops and can be hazardous particularly in wet weather and descent. Return from the summit via the inward route.