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Staffa

Exploring the island

Description

Staffa is a beautiful, uninhabited island, home to hundreds of seabirds and set within waters teeming with marine life. The island is best known for its magnificent basalt columns, especially at An Uamh Binn (Musical Cave) – more commonly known Fingal’s Cave, which has enthralled and inspired travellers for hundreds of years.

Grade

Moderate but care required

Terrain

The jetty and the route to the cave is narrow and slippery. A treaded surface marks the path and handrails have been installed in several sections. The cliff-top paths are not always obvious and visitors must take care near cliff edges especially if the grass is wet.

Distance

Jetty to Fingal’s Cave	250m
Jetty to main puffin colony	500m

Time

Jetty to Fingal’s Cave	10 mins
Jetty to main puffin colony	20 mins

OS Map

Landranger Sheet 48

Facilities

There are no facilities on the island



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WILDLIFE



Approaching Staffa during the summer months, you will notice a variety of birds flying to and from the island. The island is the nesting place for a whole range of species, including fulmars, shags puffins and gulls. The path to the north of the island is perhaps the best route to follow to see puffins. The sea around the island acts as a food store and below the surface there is a rich diversity of sea creatures besides fish. These include jellyfish, crustaceans, algae and a variety of marine mammals.

When travelling to Staffa you may see some of these creatures – dolphins and porpoises are often seen surfacing between the waves, while along the shores of Mull you might spot colonies of grey seals basking on the rocks. Look out for minke whales or even basking sharks, the second largest fish in the ocean. They can grow as long as a bus, but are harmless to humans as they feed on microscopic plankton.

ISLAND ARCHAEOLOGY

As you walk across the island you may notice low undulating lines of ‘rig and furrow’ agriculture and several ruined stone structures. We do not know for sure whether people ever lived permanently on Staffa or if they simply came here for part of the year. Early accounts mention several people and their livestock on the island. Perhaps they were here due to the shortage of land on Mull. Staffa’s largest surviving building is the ruin of a folly or shelter for travellers. It was erected in the 19th century when tourists were increasingly visiting the island.

GEOLOGY

Staffa’s amazing basalt columns formed from molten lava. As the liquid rock cooled, it hardened, shrank and fractured into a regular series of stone pillars. Because they cooled at slightly different rates, the columns vary in size and number of sides.



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