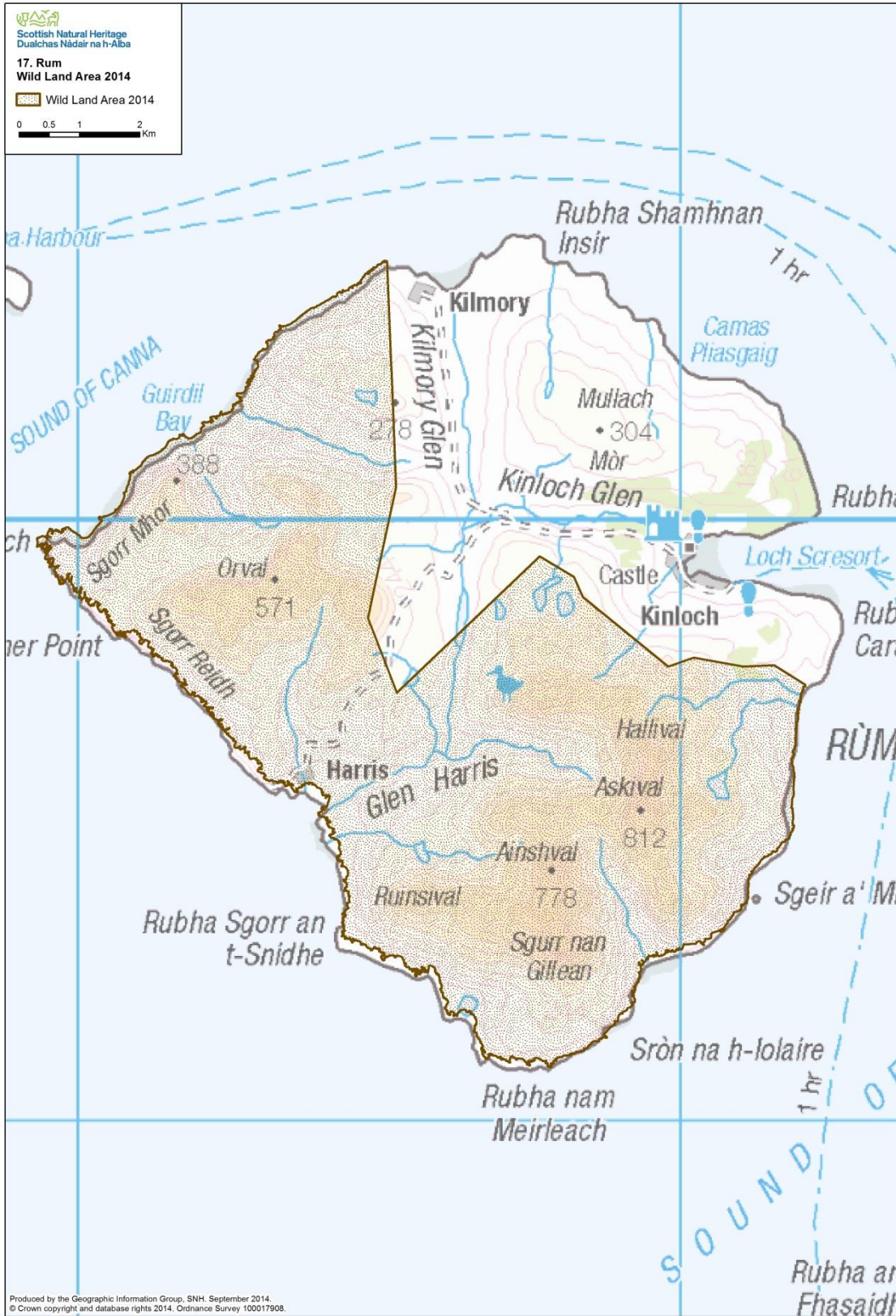


# Rum Wild Land Area



## Context

This is one of the 11 island Wild Land Areas (WLA), relatively small extending 70 km<sup>2</sup> over the southern and western parts of Rum. It is one of 12 WLAs defined in part by the coast, but unique with no public road access, the ferry from the mainland being limited to foot passengers.

The WLA is a reclined broad 'C' shape with its narrowest point notable by the presence of the Harris track. It is edged by the wide glens of Harris to the north and Kinloch to the east and mainly comprises a double arc of mountains, edged by the sea to the south, a single arc of hills dropping to the sea in the west, and an area of open undulating green rocky moorland to the north.

Rum forms a very distinctive island within the Small Isles, contrasting to the others with its concentrated core of high mountains that creates a very distinct profile against the surrounding sea. The mountains were formed 60 million years ago, with the eruption of a volcano, and then later sculpted by glaciers during the Ice Age.

The Isle of Rum was bought by the Nature Conservancy Council (a predecessor of SNH) in 1957. It is one of a number of National Nature Reserves '*... set aside for nature, where the main purpose of management is the conservation of habitats and species of national and international significance*'.<sup>i</sup> The island is highly valued for its natural heritage at both a national and international level, including designation as a Special Area for Conservation, Special Protection Area and SSSI, and including Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites.

The whole of Rum is also of high scenic value, recognised by being within the Small Isles National Scenic Area. The description highlights that this includes '*an archipelago of individually distinctive islands*', in which '*Rum is a mountainous island of moorland, rock, cliffs and glen*'.<sup>ii</sup>

SNH manage the island together with the Isle of Rum Community Trust. The hope is to encourage establishment of a larger resident community, but nonetheless recognise that '*the feeling of a 'wild island' is also an important asset for the local human community*'.<sup>iii</sup>

Rum attracts many visitors - some for just a few hours, as part of an island-hopping trip, and others staying for longer. All of these experience the WLA from a distance, as it forms the mountain and coastal backdrop to the island – views that are particularly striking from the sea, and when arriving or departing. The WLA itself is mainly visited by those on longer trips including geologists, birdwatchers and hillwalkers. For some of these, the traverse of the five major summits, including two Corbetts and a Graham, is a particular attraction whilst for others it is the path to Bloodstone Hill or the remains at Harris.

As an isolated island, when viewed from the sea, neighbouring islands or the mainland, the extent of the WLA is not always obvious. The boundary predominantly follows the coast from south of Kinloch in the east, round to the north near Kilmory Bay, whilst in the north east around Kinloch and Loch Scresort there is a more obvious edge with increasing influence of settlement, dense plantations and human activity. Conversely its north eastern extent from Kilmory through to An Dornabac is less distinct with the internal boundary broadly set back from the tracks transecting the island.

## Key attributes and qualities of the wild land area

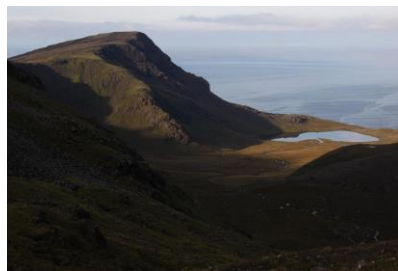
- **Rugged, arresting mountains towering above the surrounding sea, peatland and glens, with a strong sense of naturalness**

The Rum Cuillin from a concentrated group of *rugged* mountains. Although not as high as Munros, their elevation and steepness seems amplified in contrast to adjacent sea, corries, glens and moorland. The *perceived naturalness* of the mountains is emphasised by evidence of geological processes and predominant rock cover, as well as features such as crags, cliffs, scree and boulder fields.

The combination of rock, watercourses and very steep slopes means that access to the peaks is limited, *physically challenging* and of *high risk*. The dynamic quality of the physical landscape also seems to strengthen these attributes, for example with evidence of rock falls and quick changes in weather and river water levels.

The jagged skylines and sheer slopes and rock faces of the mountains appear *arresting*. The experience of the latter is aided by the ability to get in close underneath their towering forms due to the vertical nature of the slopes and the open spaces below.

The bealachs and ridges are very exposed and offer distant views that reveal the complexity of the mountain landforms, whose irregularity increase the sense of *naturalness and awe*. Conversely, within the glens, corries and peatland undulations, there is a stronger sense of enclosure and focus on foreground details, contributing to a greater *perception of sanctuary*.



- **A very rugged and steep, elevated coast, with exchange of views between land and sea, influencing remoteness and perceived naturalness and extent of the area**

There is a close relationship between land and sea within this WLA, with an exchange of open views between the two. The mountains and cliffs form a prominent and *awe inspiring* backdrop to views from the sea, with their distinctive profile identifying Rum clearly in contrast to the other Small Isles. In reverse, from the mountain tops, slopes and cliffs, the open sea provides a contrasting simple expanse that highlights the distinct attributes of the landform and coast. These compositions are often most clear and striking when approaching the land from the sea or vice versa.

No part of the WLA is far from the sea, which contributes strongly to its *perceived isolation, remoteness, extent and naturalness* – the latter influenced by the dynamic nature of waves and evidence of coastal erosion, such as stacks, skerries and caves.

Most of the coast is edged by high and precipitous cliffs, with the exception of the small sheltered bays at Guirdil and Harris, which means that access is limited and there is a *strong sense of risk* – both from land and sea. Where the steepest



mountain slopes meet the sea, such as on the south side of Ruinsival and Sgùrr nan Gillean, in addition to the western promontory of cliffs from Harris to Guirdil, these attributes are amplified further. *The entire coastline from Kilmory becomes increasingly rugged and inaccessible as far as Harris.*

Where glens and gentler moorland slopes meet the coast, for example at Guirdil, Harris, Dibidil and Papadil, access is easier and there is often evidence of past settlement and crofting, such as old stone buildings or enclosures. These create prominent foci and appear obvious as *human artefacts*, but their isolation, discrete siting and low-key design mean their effects are localised.



From the mountain tops and coastal slopes of the WLA, there are panoramic offshore views that include the other Small Isles, Skye and the mainland. Whilst most of these are fairly distant, views of settlement upon them (including lights at night) does indicate that the wild land qualities continuing offshore are limited in extent. The Isles of Eigg and Canna are most prominent in these views due to their proximity and clear visibility of houses, crofting pattern and surrounding boat activity. Seeing these elements, however, does not diminish the qualities of the WLA itself, due to these appearing sufficiently distant, small in scale and separated by an intervening wide open expanse of sea.

- **A remote interior with difficult access, few human elements, and limited outward visibility, contributing to a strong sense of sanctuary**

There is a general *sense of remoteness* and isolation across the island of Rum, which is increased further within the WLA itself that requires challenging access overland or by sea from the main settlement of Kinloch. Access routes to and within the WLA are limited to the Harris track, paths through Coire Dubh in the north, around the coast between Kinloch and Papadil, the Bloodstone path and through Glen Shellester to Guirdil, all of which, with the exception of the Harris track, are narrow, rough, often wet and require burn crossings. Consequently, access along these paths is *physically challenging*, but is even more so across the remainder of the WLA that is accessed off-path and over a very rocky or boggy, *rugged* landform.



Partly because of the challenging access, most hillwalkers that visit the WLA tend to focus upon the mountain tops and ridges via the Coire Dubh path, Dibidil or Guirdil (where there are bothies), Papadil via the eastern path, Bloodstone Hill or Glen Shellester. As these targeted areas are fairly small in extent, the *sense of solitude* within them may be diminished at the busiest times in season and during good weather. However, even at these times, there are relatively small numbers of people and a strong *sense of solitude* can always be experienced in other parts of the WLA away from the most popular foci.

The WLA is largely uninhabited and although there are isolated bothies at Dibidil and Guidil, and buildings at Harris there is still a prevailing lack of *human artefacts* and evidence of *contemporary land use* and a strong *sense of sanctuary* especially away from Harris Bay. This is heightened within the interior, where views out of the area are limited by the screening effect of the mountains or the open subtly undulating grasslands to the north of Glen Shellester. This also means, where the edges of the WLA cannot be seen, the area is often perceived to be more extensive than it actually is. Due to the wide open glens and lower lying landforms to the north, views across and out of the WLA are apparent from the more isolated peaks west of the Harris track rising up from the lower lying grassy slopes.

In contrast, *human artefacts* and *contemporary land use* on Rum are visible from the WLA margins, including views outwith the WLA to Kinloch and its surrounding woodland to the east. These human elements appear sufficiently distant, small in



scale, and low-lying to avoid imposing upon the qualities of the wild land area.

Within the WLA itself, there are some places where past and more recent land use has resulted in prominent and incongruous features. These include the mausoleum and abandoned lodge at Harris and the experimental planting blocks near Laimhrig, although these may also appear as relics that reflect the distinct history of the island. Conversely, evidence of more recent human activity includes the pony shelter and stock fencing at Harris, occasional ATV tracking and the presence of a very long deer fence across the eastern slopes of the WLA that is prominent as a *human artefact* and also diminishes the *sense of naturalness* by indicating human intervention with grazing regimes.



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#### Endnotes and select references

<sup>i</sup> SNH (2013a) *Introducing National Nature Reserves (NNRs)* [internet]. Available at <http://www.nnr-scotland.org.uk/about-reserves/introducing-nnrs/>

<sup>ii</sup> SNH (2010) *The special qualities of the National Scenic Areas*. SNH Commissioned Report No 374.

<sup>iii</sup> SNH (2013b) *Setting the scene: Wild island* [internet]. Available at: <http://www.nnr-scotland.org.uk/rum/nature-and-culture/setting-the-scene/>

**Site assessment carried out September 2013 and July 2015**