

WALK 5.1

Ard Mòr Sea Arches

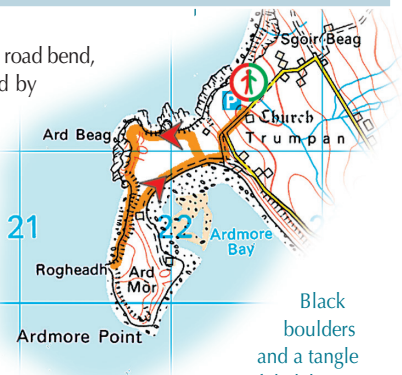
Start/Finish	Trumpan church (NG225613)
Distance	4km (2½ miles)
Total ascent	145m (475ft)
Map	OS Explorer 407

Trumpan Church lies along the western coast of Waternish. Nearby Ardmore Point is the place where Prince Charlie and Flora MacDonald attempted to alight on his crossing from South Uist, and would have done so had they not been fired on by the soldiers stationed there. This brief outing wanders across to one of the most evocative spots on the Island, around the sheltering embrace of Ardmore Bay, to visit a spectacular double arch.

There are signs near the start of the walk that seek to discourage walkers from visiting Ard Mòr; there may also be electrified fences and cattle to contend with. It is advisable not to take dogs on this walk.

Go down the hill from the church to a road bend, and then immediately leave the road by turning right through a gate onto a descending track. Sheltering below is a power supply sub-station; go past its access and a few strides further on, as you draw level with the edge of **Ardmore Bay**, turn right to walk beside a fence (on your right) to reach and overlook a smaller bay. ▶

On reaching the bay, go left, still beside a fence, climbing **Ard Beag** and descending to another bay offering a fine view of a double natural arch in the sea cliffs ahead; this is your objective. When, eventually the fence ends, a collapsed dyke leads onward to a more substantial wall not far from a group of outbuildings



Black boulders and a tangle of dark brown seaweed form the beach, washed by waters from which seals gaze at you curiously.

Do not go beyond the sea arches because the path is very narrow, eroded in numerous places, and very close to the cliff edge.

belonging to Ardmore House. Keep the wall on your left, always staying seaward of it on a narrowing path above low sea cliffs, until you arrive at a fine viewpoint overlooking the double sea arch at **Rogheadh**, said by some to resemble an elephant, but that may just be the view from the sea. ◀

THE BATTLE OF THE SPOILING OF THE DYKE

*Today in many a clachan in the Isle of Mists and rain
They tell at winter ceilidh this story o'er again
And many a timid cailleach, when the evening shadows fall,
Avoids the place that bears the name 'Destruction of the Wall'.
(The Songs of Skye: The Burning of Trumpan Church)*

On a Sunday in May 1578 a party of MacDonalDs from Uist landed in Ardmore Bay in a fleet of eight ships under cover of mist, and found their way to Trumpan Church where they surprised the local people, MacLeods, at worship. In one of the cruellest episodes in the Island's history, the MacDonalDs set fire to the thatched church, burning the congregation or putting any that escaped the flames to the sword, save one. A woman, mortally wounded, escaped and raised the alarm, though the flames of the church had been seen by the guards at Dunvegan Castle. Vengeance was swift, for the MacLeods, aided by the forces of the Fairy Flag, that changed 'the very grass blades...to armed men', set about the MacDonalDs, forced them back to the bay, where they discovered that their galleys had been beached by a retreating tide. All but a handful of the MacDonalDs were slain, and their bodies laid alongside a stone dyke that was pushed over them as a makeshift grave.

The MacDonalDs' act was itself a reprisal for an equally savage act, when the MacLeods found hundreds of them hiding in a cave on the island of Eigg, and suffocated them by lighting a fire at the cave entrance.

Sceptics might wonder at this tale. No one disputes that there was a battle, though some authorities maintain it was at a different Battle of Waternish that the Fairy Flag was unfurled.

Likewise, records show that Waternish at the time belonged to the MacLeods of Lewis, not of Skye, who did not attain possession until 30 years after the date of the massacre. Nor is there any mention among the works of contemporary writers to the Massacre of Eigg. And would the MacLeods have pushed a perfectly good wall, used as protection for crops, over slain bodies when they could



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just as easily have dumped them in the sea? Finally, in what circumstances would a sea-faring clan like the MacDonalds of Uist be likely to overlook the consequences of a retreating tide?

As is typical of Skye, here again we encounter elements of the Island's history so strongly permeated with tradition and mangled in the telling by the passage of time as to defy logical explanation. Nor should we be too diligent in seeking one.

Simply retrace your steps to the point where the wall changes direction, and there bear right with the wall, crossing rough pasture to reach a broad track and now head left around Ardmore Bay to rejoin your outward route near the power sub-station.

LADY GRANGE

In the graveyard at Trumpan Church lies Lady Grange, who died insane in 1745, following the heartless treatment by her husband, James Erskine, Lord Grange, a senator of the College of Justice and a brother of the Earl of Mar, who raised the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715. Afraid that Lady Grange was a government spy and would divulge his connivance in Jacobite plots, her husband abducted her and after carrying her first to Moidart and then to Heisker, off North Uist, finally imprisoned her for seven years on the island of St Kilda. On this remote Atlantic island she was among folk whose language she did not know, and who did not speak English. She was, by all accounts, a refined, intelligent and beautiful woman though 'cursed with a congenital irascibility of temper, bordering at times on insanity' and given to drinking. Finally, friends having discovered her whereabouts, she was brought to Skye, where she was at first confined to a cave near Idrigill Point in Duirinish, before being allowed a certain measure of freedom until death brought an end to her miseries.

The truth of this story was described by Boswell as 'frightfully romantic as if it had been the fiction of a gloomy fancy'. Yet even in her death the story of Lady Grange did not end, for, while a coffin of sods was consigned to a grave in Duirinish, her body was brought for burial to the ancient churchyard at Trumpan. It was not the first time that she had been represented by a coffin filled with sods, for her initial disappearance was explained by the announcement of her death, and her 'interment' in the churchyard of Greyfriars in Edinburgh.

TRIAL STONE

Also found in the churchyard at Trumpan is a trial stone, a single upright stone identifiable by a small cupshaped hole at the top left. Those accused of wrongdoing would be blindfold and required to prove their innocence by throwing a small stone into the hole. If they succeeded, they were judged innocent; if they failed, they were judged guilty, and dealt with accordingly.