

## The Special Qualities of the Scarba, Lunga and the Garvellachs National Scenic Area

- Uninhabited, remote, wild islands
- A seascape of distinctive and contrasting island groups
- Solitude, sanctuary, reflection and retreat
- Exceptional marine life
- The notorious Corryvreckan and the Grey Dogs
- The pyramidal island of Scarba
- The irregularly-shaped Lunga, and its attendant islands and reefs
- The low-lying slate island of Belnahua
- The sloping and rocky Garvellachs

Special Quality	Further information
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Uninhabited, remote, wild islands</i></b></li> </ul>	
<p>Set between the large mass of Jura and the Argyll mainland, this arc of islands presents a remote and isolated aspect. They are far removed from urban centres, accessible only when sailing conditions are favourable.</p> <p>Today there is no permanent habitation on any of the islands, although the remains of past settlement show that it has not always been so. While there is still some grazing by sheep and cattle, the islands nowadays have a wild and undeveloped appearance with an absence of overt human influence that belies their history.</p>	<p>The South-West Argyll coast has innumerable off-shore islands, islets, skerries, reefs and tide-swept rocky reefs and islands. These lie in a sea with powerful tidal currents and deep waters. Lying west of the Slate Islands of Seil and Luìng are the islands that comprise the NSA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Garvellachs (four islands).</li> <li>• Lunga, the three Fiolas, Ormsa, Fladda and Belnahua, Eilean Dubh Beag and Mor.</li> <li>• The larger island of Scarba.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>A seascape of distinctive and contrasting island groups</i></b></li> </ul>	
<p>These island groups are distinctive in the south-west Argyll seascape, all with interesting but contrasting rock formations. There is great variety in their individual shapes, sizes and colours, and in their relationships to off-shore islets and skerries. The pyramidal mass of Scarba contrasts with the more horizontal, irregularly profiled Lunga, which in turn contrasts with the wedge-shaped Garvellachs.</p>	<p>Despite their rocky and rough terrain, the Garvellachs' close-cropped green swards and distinctive hillsides of pink banded stone make a strong and surprising contrast with the Slate Isles dark coloured rocks.</p> <p>A prime viewpoint for these islands is from Easdale on Seil where island summits appear in the view with Jura; another is from Cullipool on Luìng.</p>

<p>The west-facing shores of these islands are exposed to the fully fury of the Atlantic Ocean, with steeper cliffs, whereas their eastern shores are gentler, opening out onto the Sound of Luing. Hence the islands tend to slope downwards, west to east.</p> <p>The archipelago is conspicuous in many of the breathtaking views from the nearby islands and the mainland.</p>	
<p>• <b><i>Solitude, sanctuary, reflection and retreat</i></b></p>	
<p>Despite appearing isolated and remote, the islands have a long history of human occupation, myth and legend. They were once on a key sea route between monastic houses, which were established to take account of the islands' overriding sense of solitude and sanctuary.</p> <p>The Garvellachs are also known as the 'Holy Isles of the Sea', in recognition of their early Christian monastic settlement. St Brendan founded a monastery on Eileach an Naoimh (<i>'Rocky Place of the Saint'</i>) to take advantage of the reflection and retreat offered by the islands. These qualities later attracted St Columba, who used the island as a retreat. Columba's mother Eithne, Princess of Leinster is said to be buried here. Links with Iona were particularly important.</p>	<p><i>'On such isolated oceanic rocks as the Garvellachs and Skelligs that Christianity managed to survive in the Celtic fringe... the islands have been uninhabited for centuries, and only the ruins bear mute testimony to the Golden Age of the Celtic church.'</i> Whittow (1977)</p> <p>An early Christian monastery was founded on Eileach an Naoimh by St Brendan in 542 AD. Eileach an Naoimh (56ha) and A Chuli have some of the oldest and most evocative Christian ecclesiastical buildings to survive in the British Isles. They are linked with St Columba and St Brendan.</p>
<p>• <b><i>Exceptional marine life</i></b></p>	
<p>The seas within the NSA are particularly rich and any visit may result in sightings of basking sharks, whales, dolphins or seals. Golden eagles or white-tailed eagles often soar overhead.</p>	<p>The surrounding seas are part of the Firth of Lorn Special Area of Conservation, designated for its rich marine life.</p>
<p><i>Location-specific qualities</i></p>	
<p>• <b><i>The notorious Corryvreckan and the Grey Dogs</i></b></p>	
<p>The seas between the islands are renowned for their dangerous tidal races, roaring whirlpools and standing waves.</p>	<p><i>'Scarba's Isle, whose tortured shore rings with Corrievreckan's roar.'</i> Sir Walter Scott, quoted in Whittow (1977)</p>

<p>The Gulf of Corryvreckan is particularly notorious, with the tidal currents here reaching ten knots, the strongest on the open coast of Britain. When conditions are right, with incoming waves meeting an outgoing current, the whirlpools and waves can be both spectacular and terrifying.</p> <p>The narrow channel between Lunga and Scarba, known as Bealach a'Choin Ghlais or the Grey Dogs, can be as dangerous and equally spectacular.</p>	<p><i>'The sea begins to boil and ferment with the tide of flood, and resembles the boiling of a pot; and then increases gradually, until it appears in many whirlpools which form themselves in sort of pyramids and immediately after spout up as high as the mast of a little vessel and at the same time make a loud report'.</i> Martin Martin (1703)</p> <p>The Corryvreckan whirlpool forms around a submerged rock stack between Scarba and Jura. Beside it lies 'the Gateway to Hell' a great, narrow, undersea pit. The whirlpool is also known as 'Cailleach' (old woman). It is at its most dramatic when spring tide is in full flood, the tide flowing westwards at a speed of ten knots against a strong west wind.</p> <p>It is said that it was named after Breacan, a Norse Prince, who foundered with his entire fleet.</p>
<p>• <b><i>The pyramidal island of Scarba</i></b></p>	
<p>The largest island within the NSA, Scarba emerges sharply out of the sea, appearing as a pyramidal mountain peak rising to 449m. Its sheer bulk and scale dominates all the other, lower-lying islands, and its coastline is bleak and rugged with many caves.</p> <p>The west coast is precipitous, forbidding and exceptionally high, with a raised beach more than 30m above sea level and with steep heather-clad slopes tumbling downwards to an unstable boulder-set shore. On its eastern flank, Scarba is well-wooded which adds an element of surprise in this oceanic context.</p> <p>It can be a hazardous boat journey to get to the island, and once there, an arduous climb leads to the summit Cruach Scarba, where there are extensive panoramic views to the Argyll and Irish coasts.</p>	<p>Scarba (Old Norse <i>skarpoe</i>, sharp, stony, hilly terrain) is 1474 ha/3,642 acres in area. The interior of the island is very rough and wet moorland.</p> <p><i>'The dominant position of Scarba in the landscape of the country... and the somewhat hazardous boat journey and arduous climb are well repaid by the bird's-eye view of the Netherlorn plateau and islands, and a wide extent of territory from the Irish coast in the south-west to Ben Nevis in the north, which is obtained from the summit.'</i> Gillies (1909)</p> <p>It is the site of an early Christian settlement. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century the island was divided into two farms, inhabited up until 1963 and intermittently since then. Luing cattle are grazed here and red deer are present. There is currently the summer shooting lodge of Kilmory.</p>
<p>• <b><i>The irregularly-shaped Lunga, and its attendant islands and reefs</i></b></p>	
<p>Lunga and its many attendant isles are all rough and rocky, with craggy and lumpy outcrops, knolls and slanting rock strata. The coastlines are misshapen, breaking down into scatters of reefs, and small tidal islands extend northwards.</p>	<p>This middle archipelago includes Lunga (254ha/628 acres) and the islands of Eilean Dubh Mor; Eilean Dubh Beag; Ormsa; Belnahua; Fladda; Eilean nan Ceann; Sgeir Poll nan Corran; Sgeir Mhic Altair; Eilean a'Bhealaich; Guirasdeal; An Tudan; Liath Sgeir.</p> <p>The islands of Eilean Dubh Mor (65 ha) and Eilean Dubh Beag (15ha) are similar in character. Eilean Dubh Mor comprises a single mound-shaped hill of 53m high connected to another small promontory with hill. Both</p>

<p>Fladda Lighthouse provides a focal seamark in the Sound of Luing.</p>	<p>islands contrast in shape with the mass of rocky, linear reefs and islets of Lunga.</p>
<p>• <b><i>The low-lying slate island of Belnahua</i></b></p>	
<p>Belnahua, one of the slate isles, is highly distinctive. It appears low and flat, barely emerging from the surrounding seascape, with a stark profile, its skyline formed by ruined slate-workers cottages, bleak, black unnatural rock profiles, machinery and its single hill lump.</p> <p>Its shores are strewn with slate and its interior comprises a freshwater loch – a flooded slate quarry.</p>	<p>Belnahua lies 1 mile (1½ km) north-west of Luing and east of the Garvellachs. Along with Seil, Luing and Easdale it forms the ‘Slate Isles’ but is the smallest island in the group. At its peak, it supported over 100 slate workers. The ruined workers cottages, machinery and disused slate quarry are still visible.</p> <p>Associated with the slate workings was a sea-based transport network, which illustrates that in the past there was a ‘connectedness’ to these islands, rather than the remoteness that is experienced today.</p> <p>The island has an extensive drying reef to its north-west.</p>
<p>• <b><i>The sloping and rocky Garvellachs</i></b></p>	
<p>Known also as the ‘Rough Islands’, reflecting both their topography and the rough surrounding seas, the Garvellachs appear to have been violently ‘thrown into the sea’, with their north-west coasts tilted sharply upwards. They have inhospitable, exposed northwest coasts made up of steep cliffs rising above a rock-platform at sea level, with the cliffs of Garbh Eileach being particularly impressive.</p> <p>From the northeast the islands appear sharply angular and uncompromisingly rocky. Limestone pavement is present and gives rise to emerald green, grassy slopes on south-east facing slopes, with many appearing as turf lawns hanging above the sea. In season they are richly dotted with flowers amongst the pink boulders. Surprisingly for such remote islands, red deer are present, sometimes seen skylined against the horizon.</p> <p>The monastic beehive cell and ruins form conspicuous features on the south-east coast on Eileach an Naoimh, and are the most ancient ecclesiastical buildings in Scotland.</p>	<p>The Garvellachs form a chain of four small, islands flanking the south-east side of the Firth of Lorne. Garbh Eileach, (<i>‘rough, rocky mound’</i>) the largest island of 142ha is flanked to its north-east by Dun Chonnuill and to its south-west by A ‘Chuil and Eileach an Naoimh. Sgeirean Dubha is a range of skerries along the alignment of the chain, parallel to south-east coast of Eileach an Naoimh.</p> <p>The islands contain limestone pavement of clints and grykes.</p> <p><i>‘Their hoary stones are now surrounded by a carpet of beautiful flowers, including scarlet pimpernels, blue pansies, yellow flag irises and primroses, all of which flourish on the rich, dark, alkaline soils of the limestones.’</i> Whittow (1977)</p> <p>There is scrubby woodland of ash, wych, elm, birch, rowan and alder on Garbh Eileach. An Clarsach is a prominent natural arch, situated at the north-east tip of Eileach an Naoimh.</p>

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