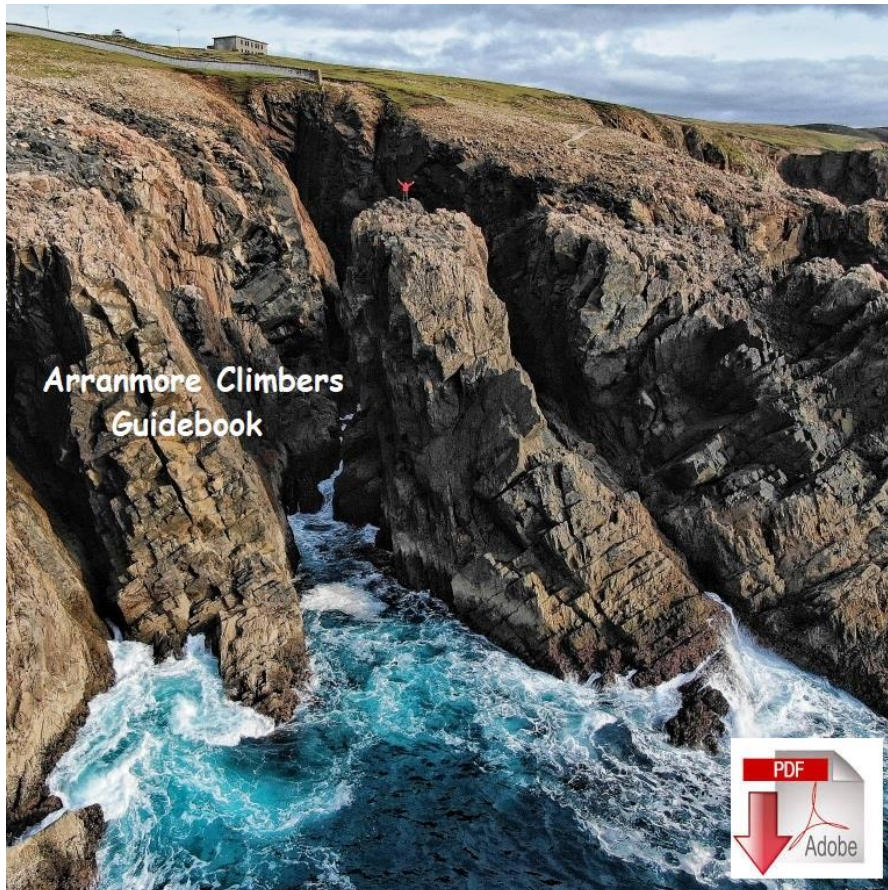


The Climbers Guide to

Árainn Mhór

By

Iain Miller



Árainn Mhór

The rock climbing so far recorded on Árainn Mhór is all found on the dramatic west coast of the island. This coast is easily divided into two main sections, the North and Southern ends. The rock climbing on the island is excellent, dramatic and more than a little adventurous, the locations described in this short article are for the adventurous exploration climber. The north coast of the island has several sections of much more sheltered rock and the potential for further development on the island is huge.



Árainn Mhór map

The Southern End

Barr da'charraig

This lovely wee sea stack sits at the base of the 50m sea cliffs approx 150m west of the Stac an Iolar basin. It is composed of an unusual black granite and provides an excellent exposed scrambling route to it's small flat topped summit. The cliff surrounding this stack provide excellent climbing on solid black granite.

To access the stack we paddled from the storm beach at the bottom of The Gully of the God's as for Stac an Iolar and simply continued along the coast to a wee recess on the west side of the stack.

Barr da'charraig Diff 40m **

Grid Ref B636144, climb the landward ridge of this immaculate wee stack on perfect black granite. Access is by "Gully of the Gods," and involves a surreal paddle through the pounding heart of Darkness.

I. Miller, C. Gleeson 24/07/11



Summit of Dragon's Lair Stack

Stac an Iolair

Sitting at the South West tip of the Island lives the iconic Stac an Iolar sea stack.

This 35m sea stack sits in the centre of a truly outstanding location in a monster amphitheatre of nautical sculptured madness. It is a short coastal walk from the main (only) road around the island to the clifftops overlooking this immaculate sea stack. The amphitheatre that surrounds the stack is a very atmospheric place to be indeed with all it's walls being vertical or overhanging for their full 50 to 70m height.

Access to sea level is down a superb 120m easy angled gully at the back of the amphitheatre. The descent is mostly stepped grass and a couple of rocky steps to a final 4m vertical wall onto the amazing storm beach. A visit to the beach alone is well worth a look as it will leave you in awe at this truly outstandly beautiful location. From the storm beach it is a 150m sea passage out to the huge sea level platform at the base of the east face of the stack. Once established on the stack it is a short but excellent traverse onto the thin platform at the base of the stack's skinny sea ward face.

The only sane route to the summit follows a steep groove up the bottom half of the sea ward face. This takes you to a very insecure feeling ledge at about 20m up the slightly overhanging west face. From this ledge the climbing becomes a lot more serious as the rock is of broken eggshell quality and meaningful protection is very widely spaced. The final pull onto the summit is a very exposed affair with massive amounts of air below your feet as you thrutch your way up the final off-width groove.

Standing on this isolated summit is a true spiritual experience and is highly recommended, alas this sea stack presents many logistical and nautical problems to be overcome for a safe and successful ascent.

Blood Line XS 40m ***

Grid Ref B636147. The Iconic Sea Stack known locally as "Stac an Iolar," sits in a truly outstanding location in a monster amphitheatre nautical sculptured madness at the South West tip of Árainn Mhór. Access to sea level is by "Gully of the Gods" and is the only sane access to the foot of this cauldron.

The stack is climbed by a well defined seaward facing corner on the sea ward ridge to a large airy stance. Continue up the wall above on broken egg shells to gain a huge left trending offwidth. Ascend the overhanging offwidth by guile to a mind blowing summit.

An ascent of this stack will live forever in your "what the f**k was I doing" memory.
S. "Jock" Read, P. Brennan, I. Miller 23/07/11

First Ascent of Bloodline film



Climbers on summit of Stac an Iolar

Stacan Áit a'chrann

This excellent 35m Quartz stack sits at the Northern end of the lonely wee bay just to the North of Cnoc na gCarn on the South West tip of the Island.

Stacan Áit a'chrann sits at the mouth of the huge bay approx 1KM to the north of the south west tip of Árann Mhór.

Access is a 1.5KM walk from the main (only) road around the island to the southern end of the 50m cliffs, grass and scree surrounding the land ward end of the bay. Descend the grass and scree ramp at the southern end of the bay to a large boulder field storm beach. Paddle 300m out to sea to gain the base of the slabby land ward face of the stack.

The stack currently has six routes ascending all four of it's different faces, the vertical sea ward face containing the slightly harder routes, following the main features up the wall. The north ridge is the easiest and best route to the summit. It is a 40m ridge traverse with some incredible exposure for such a modest sea stack.

The summit of this sea stack is washed clean by the westerly winter gales, which means in big westerly seas this stack has sea crashing green over it's summit.

Access is by a steep grassy scramble down to a huge storm beach in the bay to the East of the stack. Followed by a 300m sea passage. Grid Reference B641155

The North Ridge Diff 40m **

Starting at Sea level at the point where the stack is nearest to land, simply climb the excellent ridge to the summit.

I. Miller 08/06/10

Dark Matter HS 4b 25m **

In the centre of the West (sea ward) face climb the steep chimney come corner direct to the summit ridge.

I. Miller 08/06/10



Stacan Áit a'chrann from the South

At the Southern end of the seaward face the steepness eases and quartz jugs become abundant.

Seal Song V. Diff 20m

Climb the line of least resistance immediately as the angle of the face eases.

I. Miller 08/06/10

Selkies Song V. Diff 15m

3m right of "Seal Song" climb the airy crack and jug haul to the true summit.

I. Miller 08/06/10

Vice Grip S 25m

Climb the seaward edge of the south face, up superb quartz jugs and up through a tricky wee Groove to the summit.

I. Miller 08/06/10

Popcorn V. Diff 25m

Climb the centre of the sea ward face and up the left trending ramp to the summit.

I. Miller 08/06/10

The Slabby East face (Landward Face) is 40m long and is immaculate nodular Quartz, it can be climbed/scrambled anywhere at Diff/V. Diff.

Poll a'Chopper

In the next bay to the north lives an arête of epic proportions.

Dawn of Hope E1 5b 35m ***

Start up the steep right arête to a horizontal break. Make a cool traverse left to hang airily off amazing jugs. Mount this and hard part is over. Enjoy the easier ground in a stunning setting to the summit.

Y. Dvores, S. "Jock" Read 08/10/23



Dawn of Hope Arête

The Northern End

Drive to the Lighthouse car park at the road end at the Rinnaróis Lighthouse.

[**Google Maps Link to Rinnaróis Carpark**](#)

The following routes are all found either side of the old stone Lighthouse keepers steps running down to sea level to a very sheltered little harbour.

From the carpark follow the Lighthouse wall down towards the sea, trend slightly left to meet the broken concrete path. Follow this to the top of the old stone steps.

Crex Crex HS 4b 25m ***

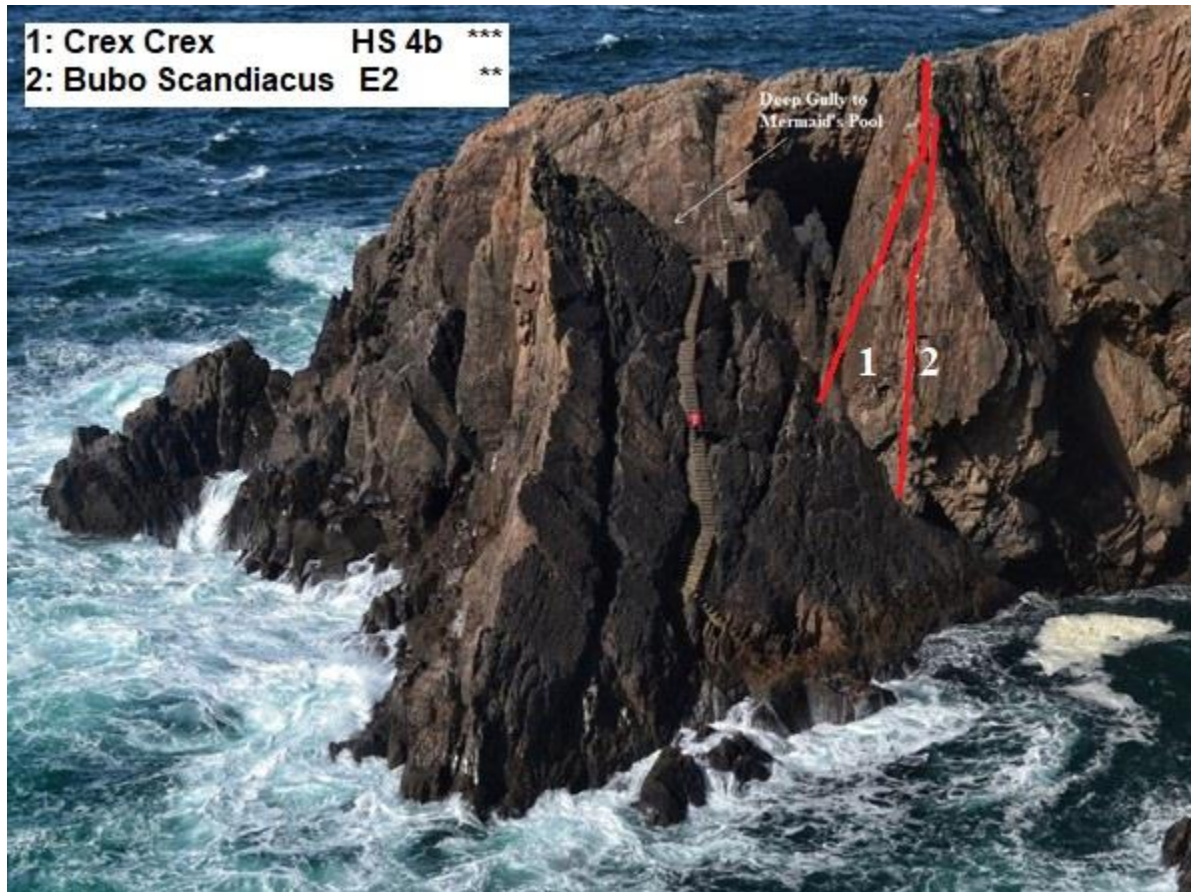
Starting approx. half way down the steps, this climb takes the stepped crack line on your left facing down. Solid, well protected and only about 4a until a tricky move up the scoop at the top.

M. Mc Guigan, A. Tees Sept 20

Bubo scandiacus (snowy owl) E2 35m **

Approx. 4m to right of Crex Crex, climb the groove pulling on very neat rock and technical bridging to a large upside down triangle flake. Move left and high rockover onto the airy arête and up the narrow corner until it steepens then move around the bulge to the right and continue up the nice crack to the top.

Y. Dvoves, S. "Jock" Read 08/10/23



About a third of the way down the lighthouse steps there is a deep V gully running out to sea on your left as you face down the steps. The following routes are found on the south facing or right-hand wall as you scramble down this gully.

The Couloir V. Diff 20m

Climb up and inside the big diagonal gash.

M. Mc Guigan, A. Tees. Sept 20

Fringe Benefits Severe 4a 20m

Climb the gearless rounded arete that forms the left hand edge of the Couloir to about half height. Cross the couloir and climb cracks approx. 1m and running parallel the Couloir.

A. Tees, M. Mc Guigan. Sept 20

The Lighthouse Keeper's Daughter V. Diff 20m *

Continue down the gully to a big pool. Ascend to above the pool from the left to gain the obvious shallow overlapping corner. Nice climbing with good gear to the top.

A. Tees, M. Mc Guigan. Sept 20

The Mermaid's Pool V. Diff 20m

A little bit further down the gully on the right is an alcove containing a secluded rock pool. Climb directly out of the pool and climb the wall above. Variations possible.

M. McGuigan, A. Tees. Sept 20

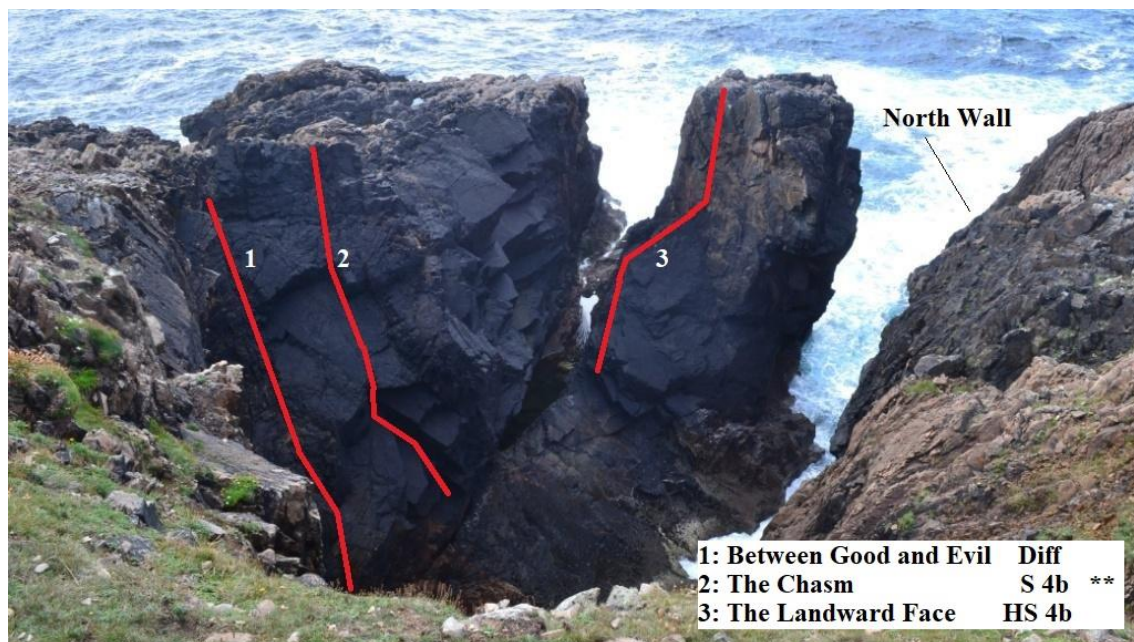
The Arête VS 15m

Across the wee access zawn and down at the big pool, climb the sharp arête and face with pretty much no gear but perfect holds.

I. Miller 17/07/23

Un-Named Stack Area

Follow the lighthouse boundary wall down towards the sea, at the bottom of this wall is a large zawn containing a very obvious sea stack.



Standing on the un-named Stack

Between Good and Evil Diff 35m

Climb out the back of the zawn on the edge of the black slab of excellent rock.

I. Miller F. Fhionnlaoich 13/07/23

The Chasm S 4b 35m **

In the centre of the black slab climb up and through the V notch at sea level. Pull onto the immaculate slab above and follow the cracks and holds through and easier notch and the top.

I. Miller 17/07/23

Un-Named Stack

The sea ward face of the stack is climbed at about V. Diff simply follow the huge holds on perfect rock. There are a few variations and they are all great climbing.

The Landward Face HS 4b 30m

Climb the arête to an excellent stance high on the face. Continue directly up on smaller but good holds

I. Miller 18/05/17

The North wall of this zawn contains numerous lines all at about V. Diff all are 35m long and follow the main features on the wall. Descend by the deep recess opposite the landward face of the stack.

Staca Poll a'Luaithe

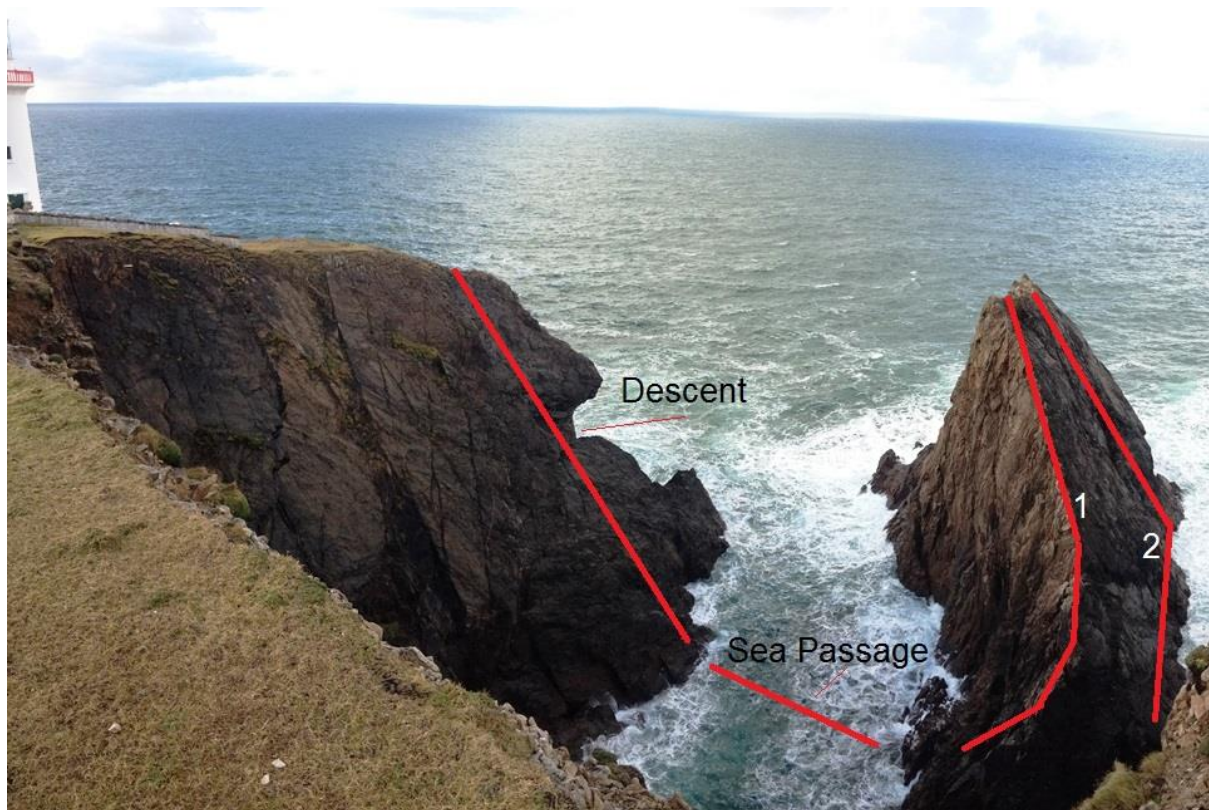
Staca Poll a'Luaithe sits immediately below the lighthouse at Rinnaróis at the far north west tip of Árainn Mhór. There is parking at the lighthouse car park at the road end and it is a 30 second walk through the lighthouse grounds to the cliffs overlooking this superb sea stack. For the best view of the stack follow the coast around past the lighthouse for 100m and you are now looking across at the stack's land ward facing ridge.

The land ward ridge on this sea stack is climbed at the very amenable grade of Diff/V. Diff and provides the best route of it's grade in Ireland. The rock is immaculate Ashfall Quartz for the 100m of climbing up this ridge.

Access is by a super scary 50m abseil down the black slabs facing the centre of the south face of the stack to a wee recess just above the high-water mark. From here it is a short sea passage to the huge sea level platforms at the base of the stack's south face.

The easiest route to the summit follows the stunning 100m land ward ridge. The higher you climb the thinner and steeper the ridge becomes increasing the exposure to an outstanding level. Every hold on this ridge is an immaculate jug and there is gear on demand all the way to the pin-point summit.

A truly great route on an outstanding sea stack in a very atmospheric and potentially dangerous location.



Staca Poll a'Luaithe Diff 85m ***

Grid Reference B 643188. This route climbs the superb landward ridge of the Staca Poll a'Luaithe found below the lighthouse at Rinnaróis on Aran Island.

Pitch 1, 30m. Starting on the huge very tidal platform at the bottom of the ridge, climb on jugs and immaculate rock to a recess on the ridge. Block Belay.

Pitch 2, 25m. Ascend the ridge to a brief wee flattening. Cam slot Belay (1 & 1.5)

Pitch 3, 30m. Continue up the ridge on endless jugs and perfect rock to a definite and outstanding summit.

I. Miller 25/07/09

The Outer Realms HVS 5a 50m **

This line climbs the ramp and groove left of centre on the south face of the stack.

Pitch 1 35m Climb the superb exposed ramp up through the bulge to a stance below the steepening and wee roof.

Pitch 2 15m Climb the steep groove above to the summit ridge.
W. Gadd, I. Miller 02/07/19

Staca Poll a'Luaithe, Árainn Mhór Island

An ascent of Staca Poll a'Luaithe film



Standing on the summit of Staca Poll a'Luaithe

Broken Arrow V. Diff 50m **

Grid Reference B643188. This route climbs directly up the North face of the stack below the light house.

Pitch 1, 25m. From the centre of the North Face base, climb up through a wee steepening on Jugs and immaculate rock to a huge crater in the middle of the wall.

Pitch 2, 25m. Follow the jugs out of the top of the crater seaward to arrive on the seaward end of the summit ridge.

I. Miller 25/07/09

Hybrid Theory V. Diff 50m **

Directly below the Rinnaróis lighthouse, follow the clifftops down from the buildings until you are facing the centre of the Lighthouse stack opposite. This route climbs the superb black ramp immediately below the huge right facing corner.

Pitch 1, 25m. From the huge ledge just above sea level directly below the corner, climb the corner ramp in immaculate black rock. Belay at top of corner.

Pitch 2, 25m. Step across the abyss and take a rightward trending line across the slab above to the summit.

I. Miller 25/07/09

Bud a'Diabhal

Few sea stacks in the world compare to this 120m monster. It's location is in the centre of the Barr a'chabhainn, it has no easy or sane means of access to it's base and the cauldron is prone to the full fury of the prevailing south west sea motion.

After several failed attempts to access the base of this stack by non-motorised transport, the planets aligned and a RiB owner and his climbing son came out to play. We accessed the base of this stack by 240hp Yanmar rigid inflatable from Burtonport, 10 or so KM away on the main land of Donegal.

On the first and only ascent to date, there were four climbers taken out in the boat, Dave Millar, Steven Reed, James Crowe and myself. Dave and Steven were deposited at the base of the stack on the lee ward east side and climbed a "Fu Manchu," a 140m route in seven pitches and graded XS. James and myself were dropped off at the base of the west face and climbed the "The Sea Ward Ridge," another 140m route in 5 pitches which we graded XS. We all met on the summit and abseiled back to sea level down the sea ward ridge in three abseils.

Both these routes are very serious undertakings and provide a full on adventure quite unlike anything else in Ireland.

The Seaward Ridge XS 140m

Grid Reference B653190. This route climbs the steep seaward ridge of this 120m monster stack. Sitting in the midst of an amphitheatre of huge cliffs, access is by an ULTRA committing paddle around Torneady point or by RiB. Abseil descent of the route.

Pitch 1, 15m. From the sea level platforms scramble up superb quartz to a large ledge at the bottom of the steep ridge.

Pitch 2, 15m. Climb on jugs up superb rock to a ledge below steep vegetation.

Pitch 3, 45m. Continue up the ridge, alternating between superb rock and deep grot grovelling. Climb the short vertical mud section (crux) to belay at base of first tower.

Pitch 4, 40m. Climb the knife edge ridge to the skyline summit ridge tower.

Pitch 5, 25m. Follow the summit ridge to the airy summit.

I. Miller, J. Crowe 08/08/09



Barr a'chabhainn

Fu Manchu XS 140m

Grid Reference B653190. Access is as per the Seaward Ridge route. This route climbs the landward face of the above monster stack off Aran Island. Start from the seaward end of the obvious tidal platform at the base of the face.

Pitch 1, 20m. Climb up good rock to the base of a distinct black chimney.

Pitch 2, 20m. Climb the disconcertingly loose chimney (belayer beware) and exit right to a grassy ledge at the base of a large hairy black slab. Excavate some holds and traverse left across the top for the gully and follow easier grass slope to good belay off blocks in a distinct black corner.

Pitch 3, 20m. Take a spectacular traverse right following relatively easier ground to belay on at the base of large crack on good quartz on the right hand side of the stack.

Pitch 4, 20m. Follow quartz blocks and steps to belay on good ledge above a short steep wall that has some huge loose blocks on the right.

Pitch 5, 25m. Follow the last of the rock for 10 meters to reach welcoming grassy summit slope.

Pitch 6, 35m. Finish along the awesome ground as per the seaward ridge route.

D. Millar, S. Read 08/08/09

Binn Mhór

This impressive 200m sea to summit ridge lives in the centre of the massive Giant's Reek cauldron just to the east of the lighthouse at Rinrawros point. It has major access issues and I do mean major.

Our access was by descending the steep slopes on the north face of Torneady point and paddling around Torneady into the Giant's Reek cauldron, this sea passage was extremely emotional and even now after two years I still have fond memories of being mildly terrified. Once in the cauldron paddle along the the base of these majestic cliff's with a growing heightened awareness of your surroundings. You are now at one with the pounding heart of the ocean and all too quickly you arrive at the small platforms at the base of the monstrous ridge soaring above you.

The ridge is climbed in as many or little pitches as you are comfortable with. The rock is heady mixture of immaculate Ashfall Quartz and manky grot with the hardest section of climbing being the initial 20m above the sea.

If this ridge lived on an Irish mountain or had a slightly less emotional access it would be a classic Irish rock climb. As it is, it is still a classic climb but it will not be the climbing that will last forever in your memory.



Binn Mhór

Binn Mhór XS 200m **

Grid Reference B654193. This truly monstrous ridge rises from sea level to the summit of this 150m+ cliff. The ridge can be very easily seen from anywhere on this coast. (or a quick glance at OSI map 1) Access to sea level is not without considerable trauma, on a long paddle was done from Torneady Point. The route up the ridge is to simply follow the very exposed crest of the ridge from sea to summit! This route is Awesome, un-escapable, Ultra committing and is guaranteed to make you smile. (eventually)

I. Miller, P. Stevens 16/07/08

Tór Scraba

Torneady Point is Árainn Mhór most northerly point. Sitting off it's western tip, 30m out to sea and at the base of the 100m high mainland sea cliffs is an unnamed sea stack. It sits in a most excellent exposed, dangerous and atmospheric location. The two routes to it's ridged summit are relatively easy alas it's access is a bit of a mindblower.

Access is a 2KM walk from the road, either through the bog and peat hags from Plughoge (B652178) or by following the clifftops from the Lighthouse at Rinrawros point. The coast walk is MUCHO drier underfoot and has amazing views of the Giant's Reek coastal cliff scapes that make Árainn Mhór famous. From the summit of Torneady the only sane way to sea level (and it's not that sane) is down the steep slope directly opposite the centre of the off shore island to the north. Once at sea level launch and paddle around the headland to your south and into the superb channel between Árainn Mhór and the sea stack. Land on the stack at it's southern landward side. And Relax!

There are two recorded routes to this stacks summit, the easier route takes the ramp and groove at the southern end of the land ward face and provides two pitches of excellent climbing. At the northern end of the landward face a much longer and better route climbs the steep north face in two pitches and end in a third pitch of super atmospheric mountainous ridge scrambling. Route details are in the **Donegal Sea Stack guidebook**.

South Face Route V. Diff 55m

Grid Reference B654196. This stack sits just to the west of the northern tip of the Island. Access is difficult and an atmospheric and committing paddle was made around the headland to the north.

Abseil descent of the route.

Pitch 1. 45m From the small recess ledge/recess at the southern end of the landward face, climb up jugs and the left facing corner to a large ramp overlooking the channel.

Pitch 2. 10m Climb the steep juggy corner to the southern summit.

I. Miller, P. Stevens 16/07/09

Dead Man's Fingers HS 4B 85m *

Grid Reference B654196. This route climbs the North Face of this stack. Access and descent as for the South Face route.

Pitch 1, 4b, 30m. Starting at the Northern end of the landward face (where the sea level tongue spits out) climb the black slab & wall. Stepleft and continue up the jug fest to a large belay ramp.

Pitch 2, 4b, 25m. Climb the flake crack out right and continue left, ascend the steep groove to belay on the summit ridge.

Pitch 3, 30m. An excellent and airy summit ridge traverse to the southern summit

P. Stevens, I. Miller 16/07/09

Disclaimer

This guidebook is intended for information purposes only, it is not an instruction manual. This free guidebook is for the use of experienced outdoor climbers to make their own judgement calls as to what is and where is safe to climb on any given day.

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained within this guidebook at the time of writing, it alas cannot be guaranteed to be completely accurate. Many of the routes, locations and even some of the islands in these guidebooks are seldom visited, with a considerable amount of the routes having only ever been climbed once before.

The west coast and islands of Donegal are very exposed to the Atlantic Ocean swells brought by the ever present trade winds. A good working knowledge of such nautical matters is essential to ensure safe practice whilst visiting and climbing on remote and very exposed sea cliffs and stacks.

Rock climbing is an activity with a very real danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities must employ appropriate levels of mountaineering / rock climbing guile and common sense. Participants must take personal responsibilities for their actions and involvement in these activities at all times.

In Ireland all land is owned by someone, the inclusion of a location in this book does not mean we have the right of access or the right to climb there. Please respect the rights of the landowner and we can continue to visit these beautiful places.