

The Climbers Guide to

Rathlin O'Birne

By

Iain Miller



RATHLIN O'BIRNE

Rathlin O'Birne island lies along the coast from the much better known Slieve League sea cliffs, it is County Donegal's most westerly point. It is easily seen from the Bunglass viewpoint at the Slieve League road end. The island sits two kilometres west of the Malin Beg coastline at the south-west tip of Donegal. It is a low lying, grassy 65-acre uninhabited island.

The island's lighthouse in 1974 was the first nuclear-powered lighthouse in Ireland and was said to be the most powerful in the country at the time. With the march of technological progress wind power replaced the nuclear-powered cells and in 1987 and in 1993 solar power and unmanned operation of the lighthouse took over.

The 8 foot high walls that surround the lighthouse are a work of art as they extend on both sides of the path from the lighthouse buildings right down to the beach on the west coast of the island. They must have provided excellent shelter for the lighthouse keepers journeys to and from the raised shingle landing beach on the east side of the island



The easiest and shortest access to the island is to kayak from the public slipway at Malin Beg. From here it is a 3-kilometre paddle out to Rathlin O'Birne via Gloster Rock at Tharal Point at the south-west tip of mainland Donegal. The best landing on the island is in the sheltered wee bay on the east side of the island. [Google Map Pin for Landing Beach](#) With the predominant south-west sea motion, this sea crossing can be much harder and bumpier than it looks with the tide racing between the island and mainland Donegal

Descent is by abseil from a rocky pinnacle left of the finish of "Footsteps In the Sand."

[Google Map Pin for the Lighthouse](#)

Footsteps in the Sand VS 4c 21m

Left of "Robinson Crusoe" is an obvious corner leading to the top of the crag. This route follows this obvious slab and corner. Small wires can be placed in the corner, and the crux is at two-thirds height.
G. Walker, J. Sheilds 13/07/1990

The Bluffer Diff 12m

Climb the obvious deep chimney three metres to the left of the previous route.
C. Shannon, G. Henry 25/7/2000

Robinson Crusoe V.Diff 20m

Start just right of an undercut arete. Move up on good holds to a small ledge. Step up and trend right to a short wall. Finish up this to a belay boulder about 6m back.

J. Shields, G. Walker 13/07/1990

Swiss Family Robinson S 4a 20m

Start a few metres right of Robinson Crusoe at the edge of cleaner rock. Easily up-flat holds to the ledge on Robinson Crusoe. Step up and left to a shallow groove. Continue at a shallower angle to the top.

G Walker 13/07/1990

Man Friday VS.4c 15m

This route takes the obvious corner and slab to the right with a small overhang on one-third height. Go up the corner with good protection, surmount the overhang (crux) using a small hold on the left, and onto easier ground up the bulging wall. From here make an exposed but enjoyable hand traverse left to a possible hanging belay below a short wall which is climbed to finish.

G. Walker, J. Shields 13/07/1990

Spot the Dog HVS 5a 17m

The route starts 6m right of "Man Friday" up an obvious groove. Climb a rough line steeply to a horizontal break at half height. Enter the groove using small holds on the left wall (crux) and continue more easily above this to a ledge. A belay is best taken on the ledge just below the top. (Poorly protected).

G. Walker, J. Shields 13/07/1990

The next four routes listed are all north of the lighthouse, just below the high wall. Abseil onto good ledges using the wall as an anchor.

D A Fruits HS 15m

Climb the arete at the end of the inlet, below the corner of the wall. Climb left side of arete until it is possible to gain the arete proper. Climb to ledge beneath the steep head wall make airy moves to the top.

G. Henry, C. Shannon 25/07/2000

First of Many HS 15m

Climb the black wall into alcove approx. 3m left of the arête. Surmount overhang using good holds above.

C. Shannon, G. Henry 25/07/2000

Thanks to Pintail HS 15m

Climb the first right gaining corner with overhang at half height, approx..5m left of the arete. Climb corner to overhang and ascend ramp above

G. Henry, C. Shannon 25/07/2000

One Before Dinner V.Diff 12m

Climb the next right corner split by two overhangs.

G. Henry, C. Shannon 25/07/2000

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.