



[previous page] The Inaccessible Pinnacle  
 [above] Fiona and her partner, Gordon Lacey [right] Looking down the steep scree ascent on the way up Sgurr Dearg to the In Pinn

STANDING ON THE SUMMIT ridge of Sgurr Dearg, seeing the infamous Inaccessible Pinnacle for the first time, I wonder, for a just a few thrilling seconds, what all the fuss is about.

Situated on the jagged ridge of Skye's Black Cuillin, the In Pinn has a fearsome reputation – considered by many the most difficult summit in Scotland, and the only Munro requiring climbing and abseiling skills. As I gaze up, I see a vast blade of rock, shaped like a shark's fin and sitting slightly askew above the 978m top of Sgurr Dearg.

At the western side, the rock spike rises at a steep, almost vertical angle, yet from the base of its eastern ridge, the 60m of ascent appears remarkably gentle. I imagine this rocky outcrop located at ground level, rather than atop a mountain ridge, and consider how easy it would be to climb.

But I'm not at ground level. And it's the airy drops, falling away to Loch Coruisk on one side and Coire Lagan on the other, that make the In Pinn a daunting proposition.

As straightforward as that scramble up the eastern edge of the In Pinn might be, when situated at one of the most exposed points in the UK, the challenge is both mental and physical.

I've known for several years that I would get here eventually. As I've worked my way through the Munros, I've mostly ignored the In Pinn and concentrated on enjoying the other, less vertiginous mountains. I've summited various other fabulous Munros that feature scrambles and ridges – the Aonach Eagach ridge, An Teallach and Buachaille Etive Mor via Curved Ridge – but if I'm honest, they each required a gathering of nerves and the encouragement of more experienced walkers.

Yet, I knew, a critical point in my pursuit of the Munros was closing in. If I ever wanted to complete a round I would have to make a trip to Skye.

## TO SKYE!

With dry and sunny weather forecast and a sudden and unexpected desire to face the Cuillin challenge head on, my



## GEOLOGY OF THE CUILLIN RIDGE

The Skye Cuillin is acclaimed as the most spectacular mountain range in Britain. The arc of jagged peaks, forming the ridge that is almost 1,000m high in places, is popular with both rock climbers and ambitious walkers. There are 12 Munro summits in the Black Cuillin, 11 of which are on the main ridge. A complete crossing of the Cuillin Ridge is perhaps Britain's ultimate mountaineering experience, and one that requires high levels of fitness and experience.

The Cuillin range represents the remains of once active volcanoes. The black rock is mainly gabbro, a coarse-grained type of basalt which is the solidified remains of the volcanoes' magma chambers. However, much of the Black Cuillin's jagged outline, including outcrops like the Inaccessible Pinnacle, is due to dykes formed from sheets of magma that cooled quickly after penetrating cracks in the earlier rocks.

The basalt rock forming these dykes is smoother, notoriously slippery when wet, and sometimes dangerously brittle. As well as vertical dykes, it also took the form of horizontal 'sills' and what geologists call 'cone sheets' – huge, sloping sheets in the shape of cones of several kilometres diameter. Differential weathering of the basalt has formed gullies, ledges and ridges.