

Saved By The Cuillin

When mountain guide Adrian was made redundant from his dream job in Snowdonia, Skye provided solace, a new home and even love

by FIONA RUSSELL

THE Isle of Skye measures just 77km (48 miles) in length and 40km (25 miles) at the widest point, yet climber and photographer Adrian Trendall reveals he would happily never leave.

“Skye has everything I want,” Adrian says, “including hills, mountains, coast, views, wildlife and a great community atmosphere. I rarely go off the island – I have to be dragged off – it’s such an awesome place to live.”

It was luck – both good and bad – that led to Adrian’s decision to move to the famous destination, off the Scottish west coast.

The island is much revered by outdoors enthusiasts, especially because of the Alpine-style Cuillin mountain ridge, and the 56-year-old had spent much of his life searching for the best place to settle.

A climber as long as he can remember, Adrian enjoyed an itinerant life in his younger days “roaming the world” in search of the best routes.

“My passion for the sport started with rock climbing and winter climbing courses at Glenmore Lodge, near Aviemore in the Highlands.

“I wanted to travel and climb and I would work all kinds of jobs, to raise money for my next trip.

“I was fortunate to be able to climb all over the UK, Europe and America. I would spend months in each location and I’ve completed many classic routes.”

“Glen Brittle couldn’t be more perfect for a mountain guide”

One of Adrian's
climbers on the
Inaccessible Pinnacle



Adrian and
Bridgette

In his early 30s, Adrian finally settled into a career in the outdoors. He worked for two years in south-west England, guiding walkers over Dartmoor.

He then took a position at Ogwen Cottage in Snowdonia, Wales, as an outdoor and climbing instructor, having gained a Summer Mountain Leader qualification. His role included working with children from disadvantaged backgrounds as part of an outdoor education unit funded by Birmingham City Council.

"I was at Ogwen for 12 years and it was a great job," Adrian says. "It was very rewarding. But then there were council funding cuts and I was suddenly redundant."

He says the next period of his life was pretty tough.

"I became depressed and I struggled to find focus in my life. My escape was to spend time on Skye.

"I had long had a fascination with the island's mountains but due to my work over the previous decade I'd had limited time to visit. I started making longer trips to Skye and I found being on the island very therapeutic."

During this time, Adrian made comprehensive diaries of his trips, recording his walks and climbs, especially on the iconic Cuillin Ridge. He also set up a freelance guiding business, while still living in England.

What came next took Adrian by surprise.

"On one trip to Skye I met Bridgette, who is now my wife. It was October 2016, we bumped into each other in Sligachan, near the Cuillin, and we got chatting.

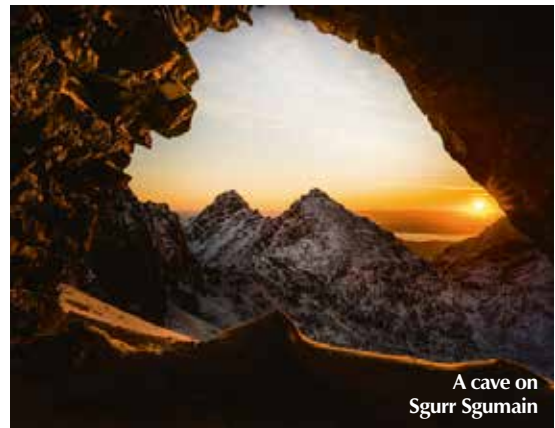
"We were married in November 2018 on Skye. In between, we decided to move to the island together."

At the time, Bridgette, who has two grown-up children, lived near Bristol and worked at the university.

"We asked around online," Adrian says, "and found a place to live temporarily at Sconser, a small settlement by Loch Sligachan.

"It felt like the right place to be, near the sea and with amazing views of the Red Cuillin, but still close enough for an easy drive to the Black Cuillin and the ridge. It gave us time to work out where we would settle permanently.

"We've been very fortunate and have purchased land at Glen Brittle, which could not be more perfect for a mountain guide as it is at the foot of the Cuillin ridge.



A cave on
Sgurr Sgumain

"Of course, we could not have foreseen the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown, so while the building of our eco-house should have started already, we are hoping it will get underway later in 2020."

The couple have been delighted by the welcome they have received on Skye.

"The community spirit is fantastic and I feel like we have fitted in quite well. We have been keen to become a useful part of the community and we join many volunteer activities, such as beach cleans and removing litter at the Fairy Pools.

"We like how everyone looks after each other and this has been especially evident during lockdown." »

The Cuillin Ridge

Often described as the ultimate UK ridge, a traverse of the Cuillin range extends to 12km (seven miles) of scrambling, more than 4000 metres (13,000 feet) of ascent/descent, several classic climbs and abseils to say nothing of the three-hour walk in – and the same out again.



Descending the Inaccessible Pinnacle



A spring camp on Sgurr na Stri

In 2017, the couple also set up a business, All Things Cuillin, as well as a Facebook group of the same name, which now has almost 7500 members.

Adrian offers his services as a climbing instructor and mountain leader in the Cuillin, while Bridgette prefers to lead people on lower-level walks around the island.

They are both keen photographers and sell their work through the website. In addition, Adrian has become the author of a new book, *Skye's Cuillin Ridge Traverse*, published by Cicerone earlier this year.

"I remember during my first trips post-redundancy on Skye," says Adrian. "I was frustrated I couldn't find what I felt was a useful guidebook for a Cuillin traverse. I wanted one that offered all the details in a logical order.

"I had the idea to write a guidebook. It was only more recently this became a reality."

The Cuillin Traverse book is in two parts. The first volume provides information about equipment, weather and strategy for completing a full 12km (seven-mile) traverse. There are also 10 "classic scrambles" meant as practice routes. Volume two covers the ridge itself in great detail and is a small enough to take with you.

"It is in simplified geographical order with topographical maps, photos and details step-by-step," Adrian says. "It is exactly what I wished I'd had."

Adrian says that he has seen an increased interest in recent years from people who want to complete a Cuillin traverse and also those keen to reach the summits of the



“A spaniel called Genghis came to do the Cuillin Munros”



Frozen lochan on
Druim nan
Ramh Ridge



The In Pinn from
Sgurr Sgumain

Pictures: ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF ADRIAN TRENDLELL

11 iconic Munros, Scottish mountains of more than 914m (3000 feet), on the narrow ridge. The 12th Munro on Skye, Blà Bheinn is separated from the main ridge, and can be included in the Greater Cuillin Traverse.

“Social media has been a major driver in spreading the word and increasing the popularity of the Cuillin.


“Last year, was very busy and there were so many incredible times. For example, a springer spaniel called Genghis came with his owner to do all the Cuillin Munros.

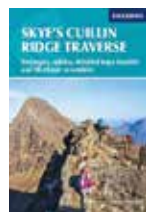
“There was also a couple from Cornwall, who had spent more than 30 years walking Scotland’s Munros. They wanted to do the Cuillin Munros but were scared. In the end it was one of the best traverses I’ve done.”

Despite being in the Cuillin many times and

completing countless traverses, Adrian says he never tires of the mountains.

“It’s the people that make it different every time, plus the weather and conditions,” he says. “No day is ever the same and you never see the same view twice.

“In fact, my next project is to produce a coffee table photography book of Skye. There is so much to showcase, in the mountains, lower level and at the coast.” 



Skye’s *Cuillin Ridge Traverse* is now available from Cicerone. See allthingscuillin.co.uk for more information.