



Cock of Arran

## Geology of the Isles of Arran and Islay (9 days) Hiking the southwestern edge of Scotland

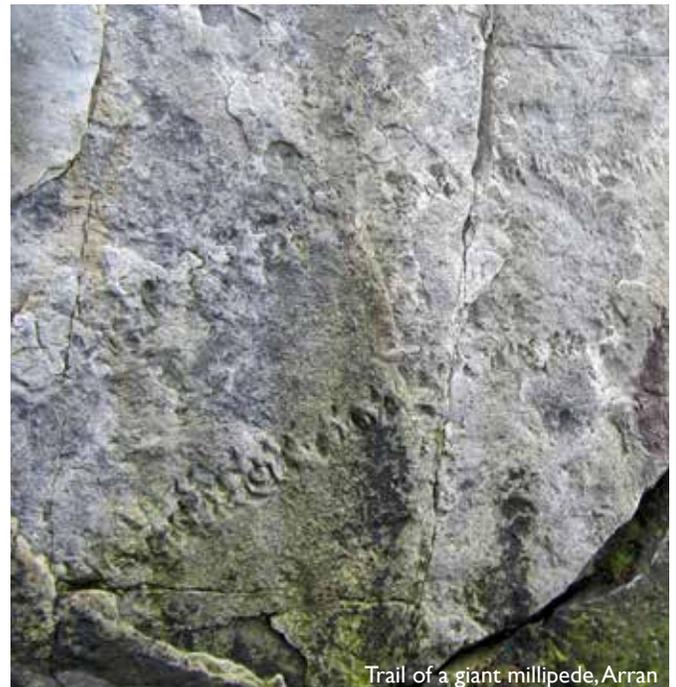
This itinerary takes us to the southwestern edge of Scotland, across two incomparably beautiful and fascinating islands, Arran, and Islay. Edges are immensely important in geology because it is there that continents have repeatedly met and parted; on each occasion leaving the trace of their tectonic dance written clearly in the landscape. You will see these geological clues in beautiful settings - without having to cover huge distances - from our welcoming and comfortable hotel bases on the islands.

### Highlights

- Spectacular mountain scenery of Glen Sannox
- Cock of Arran walk with Hutton's unconformity and the millipede trail
- Basalt columns at Drumnadoon Point and walk along the coast to King's Cave, Arran
- The standing stones and stone circles on Machrie Moor, Arran
- A stroll on the sandy beach of Machir Bay, Islay
- Hike on the cliffs to the Mull of Oa, Islay
- Visit to one of Islay's eight malt whisky distilleries



Ireland



Trail of a giant millipede, Arran

1. Glasgow - Isle of Arran
2. Glen Sannox
3. Cock of Arran
4. Kildonnan & Glenashdale Falls
5. King's Cave & Machrie Moor
6. Arran - Kintyre - Islay
7. Machir Bay to Saligo Bay
8. Mull of Oa and distillery tour
9. Isle of Islay - Glasgow



**ABOUT ARGYLL**  
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Saligo Bay, Islay

## Introduction

Scotland used to be part of North America. An ocean closed long ago when it, and the rest of the continent, ran smack into Europe and England. For good? No. Another ocean opened, to volcanic fireworks, but Scotland stayed British while America sailed away to the west as the Atlantic grew wider and wider.

Today, western Scotland displays the clues to this spectacular story. This physical landscape has influenced human history. Crucially the west of Scotland was accessible by sea and the oldest proofs of human habitation can be found along the coast and on the islands.

## Isle of Arran

Arran is one of the most varied geological areas in the British Isles, and is often referred to as 'Scotland in miniature.' It lies on the Highland Boundary Fault which makes the island geologically very interesting with both Highland and Lowland landscapes. The northern part of Arran is very much a mini-Highlands with spectacular granite peaks, corries and wooded glens. In contrast, the south of the island has sweeping moorlands and wide sandy beaches. We will explore both during our hikes.

Arran is one of the sites at which James Hutton (1726 - 1797), first identified unconformity of the geological structure. He was then able

to put forward a theory about the geological history of the earth that was to have as profound an effect upon society as did Charles Darwin's 'Origin of the Species'; as he was the first to propose that the earth's surface had evolved over an immense period of time.

## Isle of Islay

The landscape of Islay is very different from Arran and the other islands along the west coast.

The underlying rocks of Islay have been raised and eroded many times in geological history. It was two relatively recent geological events which, combined, give this part of Scotland the appearance it has today. One was the flooding of the continental margin of Europe, possibly as recently as 10 million years ago, creating the islands off the west coast of Scotland, including Islay. The other main events in creation of today's landscape were the Ice Ages.

Related to the retreat of the ice-sheets are marine-cut platforms and raised beaches, forming level areas of well-drained land, as attractive to farmers today as they were to the first settlers in Islay's Mesolithic period. The relative heights of the sea and land changed as the ice melted. When the ice melted, it did so relatively quickly, sea levels rose rapidly and much of Islay would have been under the sea. However, with the weight of ice removed, the land rose out of the sea again, leaving former beaches high and dry.



Mull of Oa, Islay



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