

Dinosaurs in Trotternish

by Neil D L Clark, Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow

Dinosaurs are rare in Scotland. Although dinosaurs have been known of in England and elsewhere in the world for over 300 years, it was only in the last 23 years that dinosaurs began to appear in Scotland. The first discovery of dinosaur remains on the Isle of Skye was that of a single 49cm long ornithopod footprint discovered in 1982 at Brothers Point. Since then **dinosaur footprints** and trackways have turned up elsewhere on the Trotternish Peninsula in 165 million year old Middle Jurassic rocks. Dinosaur bones have also been found in rocks of Hettangian (205 million year old), Bajocian (170 million year old) and Bathonian (165 million year old) rocks from the south of the Isle of Skye to the northern tip of Trotternish.

It is difficult to tell how many people now visit Skye for its dinosaur remains, but the popularity of dinosaurs amongst children and adults alike continues to grow as new Hollywood dinosaur block-busters are released every few years. **Visitors to Staffin** have certainly increased as a result of the dinosaur discoveries made between Bearerraig Bay and the popular beach near the slipway at An Corran, Staffin Bay. With the Dugald Ross' **Staffin Museum** open from Easter to autumn, the public have the rare opportunity to see **Scotland's most prestigious and largest collection of Scottish dinosaur remains than that held anywhere else in the World**. The giant footprints of the carnivorous dinosaur found at An Corran are the most accessible dinosaur remains, but are only exposed during the winter months due to the encroachment of the beach sand during the summer (see photo).

This year, dinosaurs from Skye will be making an historic appearance in the **Guinness Book of World Records**, as Skye has the World's smallest dinosaur footprint that was discovered at Score Bay in 2004! The prints are in the Hunterian but the Staffin Museum has a copy.

One interesting possibility for the future may be a **geological twinning project** with a dinosaur footprint locality in **Wyoming, USA**.

The footprints in the Red Gulch near Shell (population less than 100), Wyoming are very similar and are of exactly the same age as the footprints found near **Staffin**. At the time they were made, 165 million years ago, Skye was a lot closer to what is now North America, and may have allowed a migration of dinosaurs between Skye and America. Middle Jurassic dinosaur remains are very rare worldwide, but more so in the United States. The Red Gulch footprints were only just found in 1997, not long after the majority of dinosaur finds were discovered on Skye. Perhaps one form this **twinning** exercise may take is an internet link-up between schools on Skye and schools in the vicinity of Shell to discuss the effect that the discovery of dinosaurs has had on their communities. In 2005, **Staffin was host to the dinosaur expert from the Smithsonian Institute**, Washington DC, Dr Mike Brett Surman, who is also a lead researcher on the Red Gulch dinosaur remains, and his wife, Kim, who is in charge of exhibition design at the Smithsonian Institute as well. He was impressed with the quality and number of discoveries that have been made recently and is keen that a line of communication is maintained between Scotland and the USA, to keep each other informed of new discoveries and other developments. If all goes well, and can raise the necessary funding, I will be travelling to Shell to talk to researchers and the community there about the dinosaurs from Skye. (Neil D L Clark, Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow, GLASGOW, G12 8QQ)

The World's smallest dinosaur footprint that was discovered at Score Bay, Trotternish.



Neil Clark , Hunterian Museum and George Nicolson, Staffin, looking at one of the giant footprints of a carnivorous dinosaur at An Corran, Staffin Sands.

