

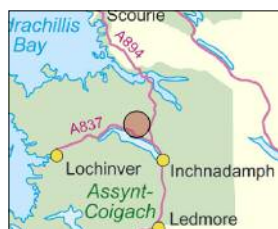


From Loch a' Chàirn Bhàin:
Quinag's northern peaks, Sàil
Gharbh with its Barrel Butress,
and Sàil Ghorm.
Photo by Eric Meadows



KEY FACTS

Acquired by the John Muir Trust in November 2005



Summits

Sàil Gharbh 808m (2657 ft), Sàil Ghorm 776 m (2546 ft) and Spidean Coinich 764 m (2506 ft). All three summits are Corbetts (Scottish mountains 2500–3000 ft).

Area

3400 ha (8400 acres).

Designations

- Part of the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area (shown green in map above).
- Contains part of: Ardvur Woodlands Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Assynt Lochs SSSI; Ardvur and Loch a' Mhuilinn Special Area of Conservation (SAC, in blue on map above right); Assynt Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA).

Population

No resident population.

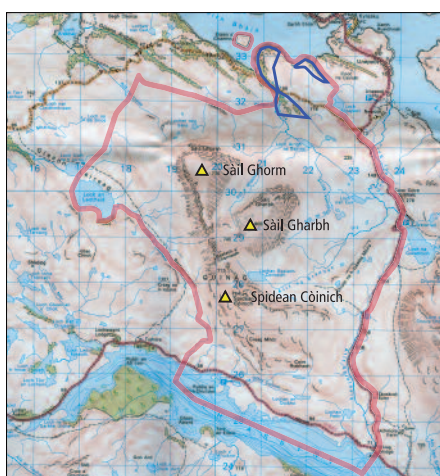
Partnerships

- The John Muir Trust is a partner in the Assynt Foundation, which in 2005 took over the estates of Glencanisp and Drumrunie, lying to the S and W of Quinag.
- Crofting – 245ha of Newton and Newton Unapool common grazings are at the N of the estate.

Maps

- OS Landranger 1:50 000, sheet 15, Loch Assynt.

THE LAND



Quinag is a Y-shaped range of mountains with three main peaks and four other tops. It is the northernmost of a series of striking individual mountains in Coigach and Assynt. W H Murray wrote of those 'great sandstone stacks ... the Quinag, Canisp, Suilven, and the peaks of Coigach, all set widely apart and each lifting its head like some petrified monster from the gneiss billows rolling in from the coast'.

Quinag is a mountain of broad and high ridges offering huge

views out to sea and across the low-lying 'cnocan-lochan' terrain of Sutherland.

Its skyline inspires from any compass point. From Kylesku bridge, it presents the two great northern buttresses of Sàil Mhor and Sàil Ghorm. From the foot of Loch Assynt, its cliff-lined flanks fill the horizon, and from the loch head at Inchnadamph its three tops rise above spacious moorland, with Ardvreck Castle in the foreground.

Why are we here? The previous owners of Quinag, the Filmer-Sankey Family Trust, wished to secure the guardianship of the mountain for the future and offered to sell it at an agreed and fair price. The Trust was in the fortunate position of having an offer from an anonymous donor of the bulk of funding required. Conservation management by the Trust will lead to enhanced habitats for wildlife and richer biodiversity, in particular in the remnants of ancient woodland which persist on the northern side in mountain gullies and sheltered spots near the seashore.

The name There is no letter Q in Gaelic; its name in that language is Cuinneag – a churn or pail. The hill was often known as *the Quinag*. Sàil Mhor and Sàil Ghorm are *big heel* and *blue heel* respectively. Spidean Coinich is *mossy peak*.

Map reproduced from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright, Licence No AL 100034628.

VISITING QUINAG

Access John Muir Trust land is open to all, and we welcome all visitors. We trust visitors will respect the wishes of the people who live and work on the estates.

Walking on Quinag From the car park (see below) many visitors go up Spidean Coinich by its east ridge – it's a walking route, though rough and with steep drops to the North. Those heading for other tops then carry on to the col (Bealach a' Chornaigh) where there's a choice of which of the other tops to go to next. A low-level approach via the loch and the bealach beyond it is also possible. Visiting all the tops entails about 14 km rugged walking. Quinag has many cliffs and is a remote hill, with no waymarking or shelter. Walkers should be able to navigate, and should come suitably equipped.

Getting there by car Informal parking in an old quarry at the east side of the A894 close to its highest point (about 250 m), NC233273.

Public transport An Inverness–Ullapool–Lochinver–Durness bus service passes daily Monday to Saturday in the summer months (Tim Dearman Coaches, Ardrross). Lochinver has local bus or postbus services to Ullapool and Lairg.

Facilities There are no buildings or facilities on the estate. The fishing port of Lochinver is the nearest place with all visitor facilities. In Lochinver, the Assynt Visitor Centre houses the tourist information service (summer only, 01571 844330) and is also a base for Highland Council rangers, for advice and information on walks and wildlife (01571 844654). North West Highlands Geopark has a base at the Culag Building in Lochinver (tel 01571 844000) and a visitor centre, with trails and interactive exhibitions, at Knockan Crag. There are a hotel and hostel at Inchnadamph, and at Kylesku hotels, and boat trips on two sea lochs.

Natural history

Geology Quinag is mainly formed of brown Torridonian sandstone, 1000 million years old, on a hummocky plain of Lewisian gneiss which dates from 3000 million years ago (and which rises to about 600 m on Sàil Gorm). Two of the peaks are capped with pale quartzite. Assynt, including Quinag, is highly significant for structural geology. Here, rocks of the Moine Series, which forms most of the northern highlands, collided with Lewisian gneiss and its overlying sediments. Until perhaps 420 million years ago, Quinag was North American; it only became part of the Scottish highlands in the collision of crustal plates expressed in the Moine thrust. Much more recently, ice scoured the landscape leaving the sandstone stacks and towers.

Quinag is in the North West Highlands Geopark, reaching from the Summer Isles to the north coast.

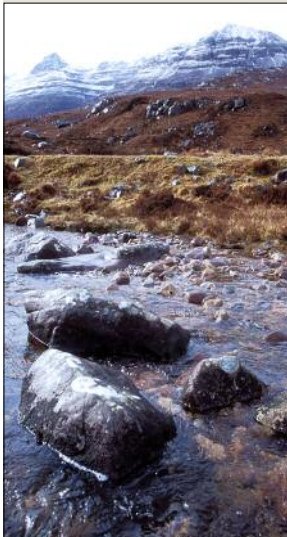
Vegetation 'None of the other hills have such a wide range of communities and species as Quinag, particularly those favouring base-rich habitats' (*Flora of Assynt*).

Upland heath is the main habitat on Quinag, and one of the key habitats identified in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). Much smaller areas of the estate support two other BAP

habitats: blanket bog, and upland oakwoods (mainly oak and birch in the canopy, with holly, rowan and hazel as the main understorey species). Aspen is a notable tree at Torgawn. We aim to conserve the bogland and to enable the woodland to expand.

Fauna Red deer are present in high numbers. Notable mammals include mountain hare, water vole, otter and pipistrelle bat. Assynt Lochs SSSI, which includes part of the estate, is designated for black-throated divers. You may see ptarmigan on the ridges which, overlooking huge tracts of lower ground, also offer the chance of seeing golden eagles.

● Our survey programme for Quinag is at an early stage. We'll update this factsheet regularly.



Top: the Quinag 'range' Ken Paterson; right: orchid, alpine ladies' mantle and thrift Denis Mollison; below: Loch Assynt from the ridge Denis Mollison.



Partnerships

The John Muir Trust assisted the community based **Assynt Foundation** to buy the adjoining Glencanisp and Drumrunie estates in 2005, and is now in partnership with the foundation in the future management of those estates. The Trust's own purchase of Quinag later that year reinforced its commitment to the wider area, and will enable a unified conservation management approach to this vast tract of land, one of the few areas of Scotland whose scale gives a real sense of wilderness. It is the Trust's aim to work with all our neighbours, who include the crofting communities of **Newton** and **Newton Unapool** to the N of Quinag, and the **Assynt Crofters' Trust** which made the the pioneering community buyout of North Assynt Estate in 1993.

Glencanisp Lodge, acquired with the estate by the Assynt Foundation, is available for let or hire.



More about Quinag at
www.jmt.org

Below L-R: A 2006 JMT work party relax after laying woodland monitoring transects, clearing some cairns from the summit and doing path repairs David Durie; winter afternoon, with Spidean Coinich on the left, looking up the great corrie to Lochan Bealach Cornaidh Ben MacGregor; remnant woodland, where grazing pressure threatens regeneration Sam Baumber.

Human history

Assynt has been inhabited since at least the Neolithic period, but coastal monuments seem limited to the Bronze and Iron Ages, with well-preserved duns at Kylestrome and Ardvar, and a souterrain in Glenleraig, all close to JMT land. From then on, the coast was inhabited, with extensive settlement at Ardvar and Glenleraig (including ancient managed woodland), and some shielings on the lower slopes of Quinag. The bay at Torgawn may have been occupied until the Clearances.

John Muir Trust at Work

Since buying the estate we have begun to assemble information from existing sources, and to commission our own surveys (starting in 2006 with the vegetation of the southern part of Quinag).

The first management plan is now being prepared. A key part will be the management of red deer whose numbers greatly exceed the ideal carrying capacity of the ground, leading to over-grazing and damage to tree seedlings and other plant communities. Regeneration of the native woodland is poor on

higher and open ground, but quite good on steeper slopes nearer the sea. Grazing by red deer is a significant factor. We consider that the deer has an important place in the landscape, but it must be in harmony with everything else. We will therefore measure impacts of grazing and set annual deer cull figures at a level that permits regeneration.

We would like ultimately for the native woodland remnants to expand, in a gradation from coastal woodland through to open montane scrub woodland on the high ground.

