

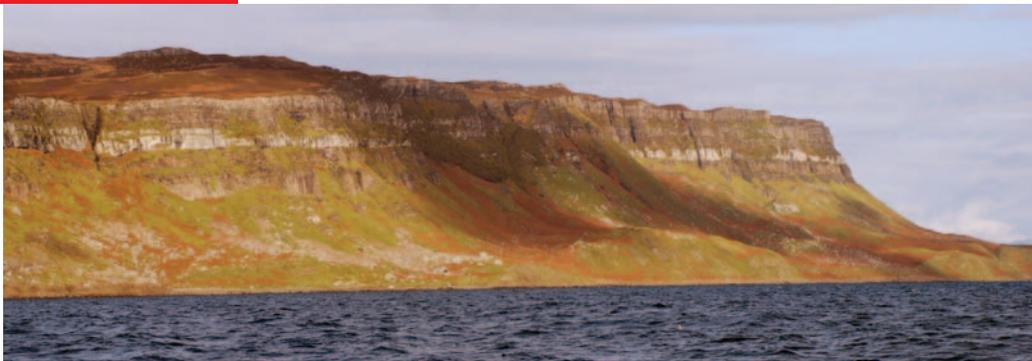
## ALL ALONE

Back in 2008 (*Elements* 4: 431), I provided a Parting Shot on the topic of the names of igneous rocks, a field which, I'm glad to say, has defied all attempts at systematization. The names are a glorious ragbag, based mostly on places or regions, a few on minerals, and some go back to antiquity. Perhaps it is the diversity of sources and languages that makes them easy to remember, but the system certainly works. One rock I singled out was mugearite, an extrusive rock of mildly alkaline character intermediate between alkali basalt and trachyte.



Mugeary, all alone on the Isle of Skye

Mugearites are not uncommon in the British Tertiary Province, although the overwhelming majority of flows are basaltic. They are often a paler colour than the basalts, as in my example from the lovely Isle of Eigg. Mugearite is named after a single, small farmhouse called Mugeary in a vast expanse of wind-swept bog in the north-west of the Isle of Skye. The farmer knew his house had given its name to a type of rock so I sent him the issue of *Elements*. He e-mailed to say that he had enjoyed the article, and that his super-intelligent black-and-white dog, whom I had also met, had enjoyed it too!



↑ Predominantly basaltic Palaeocene lavas on the Isle of Eigg. The pale flow is a mugearite.

← Jake Matijevec, the Martian mugearite, all alone on the Martian surface. The red dots are where the rock has been zapped by the rover's laser, and the purple circles show where the alpha particle X-ray spectrometer had a look. PHOTO: NASA

It was prescient that I chose mugearite for my piece because on September 22, 2012, the Curiosity rover on Mars analysed a rock, called by the team 'Jake Matijevec' after one of the rover designers, that has the right composition to be a mugearite. That little, lonely cottage has lent its name to a rock on Mars. And there are other coincidences. Curiosity landed just south of the Martian equator and is working its way from the Bradbury landing site towards a location about 500 m to the east, which the team have called Glenelg. Jake is at about the half-way point. Glenelg is a village of 1500 souls on the Scottish mainland coast 50 km south-west of Mugeary and is known locally as the 'palindromic capital of the Highlands'. In

fact the NASA team named their site Glenelg after a locality near Yellowknife in northern Canada, so the Martian site is only second-hand Scottish. And a final coincidence is that the petrologist who presented the Jake data, Ed Stolper of Caltech, holds an M.Phil. and an honorary D.Sc. from my university.

My admiration for the engineers and geologists who make these planetary missions possible is unbounded, and it will be exciting to see if rocks more evolved than mugearite are found. It's interesting to turn things round and contemplate the problems faced by a team of Little Green Men (and, no doubt, Little Green Women) on Mars designing a lander to cope with the sodden bogs and knee-deep heather around Mugeary. Mars suffers extremes of temperature unknown on Earth, but life could be worse for Curiosity!

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## PARTING QUOTE

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JACK LONDON

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