

The views looking out from Eilean Bàn ('White Island'), encompass the Five Sisters of Kintail to the east, the Cuillin Mountains to the west and Applecross to the north east. But for local mariners navigating Loch Alsh, Eilean Bàn's unique position has always awarded it a special significance in this dramatic landscape.

The island's importance was officially recognised in the 1800's when Trinity House took the decision to establish a [lighthouse](#), to help ensure safe passage through the Loch Alsh channel. With its completion in 1857, the lighthouse sealed Eilean Bàn's significance to those who used and lived by these waters, becoming a focal point for passing sailors, fishermen and all those from the local communities who left their homes for any length of time. Eilean Bàn signalled their departure from families and loved ones, and their first glimpse of home on return.

It was not until [automation of the lighthouse](#), and therefore the departure of the lighthouse keepers, that private individuals were able to live on Eilean Bàn.

[Gavin Maxwell](#)

is known as the most famous of the subsequent residents. Maxwell made the island his own, and with the hardwork and skills of his close friend (and later biographer)

[Richard Frere](#)

, the two lighthouse keepers cottages were transformed into one single, impressive dwelling. However, the island was not destined to stay in private ownership, as the Scottish Office eventually made a compulsory purchase to enable the Skye road bridge to be built.

After completion of the Bridge in 1995, the Scottish Office took the decision to sell the island by auction. They had not, however, counted on the strong and deep association of the island within the neighbouring village communities. When the residents of Kyleakin and Kyle of Lochalsh heard of the proposed sale, they began a campaign to stop it and to bring the island back into community ownership instead.

At the same time the [Born Free Foundation](#) (BFF) had learnt of the proposed auction, and had also started a campaign of opposition. It was not long before each group learned of the other's existence and, recognising their shared aims and strength in numbers, the BFF and the two communities joined forces. The ultimate success of this collaboration saw the island withdrawn from auction and in 1998 the Eilean Bàn Trust was formed with representatives from the two local communities and the BFF.

The aim of the Trust, then as now, is to keep Eilean Bàn in community ownership with a view to re-emphasize its associated heritage, and to instigate a program of environmental and conservation measures. Such measures not only benefit the many species that inhabit the island, but also maintain the island as a community asset with a significant bearing on the local economy.