

WALKING

in and around

Kirkcudbright & Auchencairn



The natural place to walk





Kirkcudbright

The journey from Kirkcudbright to Auchencairn covers some of the most spectacular stretches of coastline in Dumfries and Galloway, fringing the Solway Firth and looking across to the distant hills of Cumbria. The two make the most of their coastal setting, boasting their own individual charms and personalities.

Kirkcudbright is a busy fishing and farming town situated on the River Dee estuary. Known as Kirkcudbright Artists' Town, it has a thriving artistic community and has been a source of inspiration for many well-known artists, including E A Hornel, Jessie M King, E A Taylor and Charles Oppenheimer. The town of Kirkcudbright is home to galleries and museums, where exhibits often illustrate this stunning area of Dumfries and Galloway. Enjoy a stroll along the River



Dee or explore the coast towards Dundrennan, savouring the peace and quiet and fresh air.

The village of Auchencairn dates from the early 17th Century. The village grew around the corn mill and the oldest buildings are

MacLellans Castle, Kirkcudbright



those nearest the mill. Smuggling was once rife and Balcary House (now Balcary Bay Hotel) was reputedly built from the proceeds. Today, it is quiet and unspoilt. Several craft and specialist businesses operate successfully here but it is predominantly a farming community. The Smugglers Inn in the village serves food, as does the Balcary Bay Hotel.

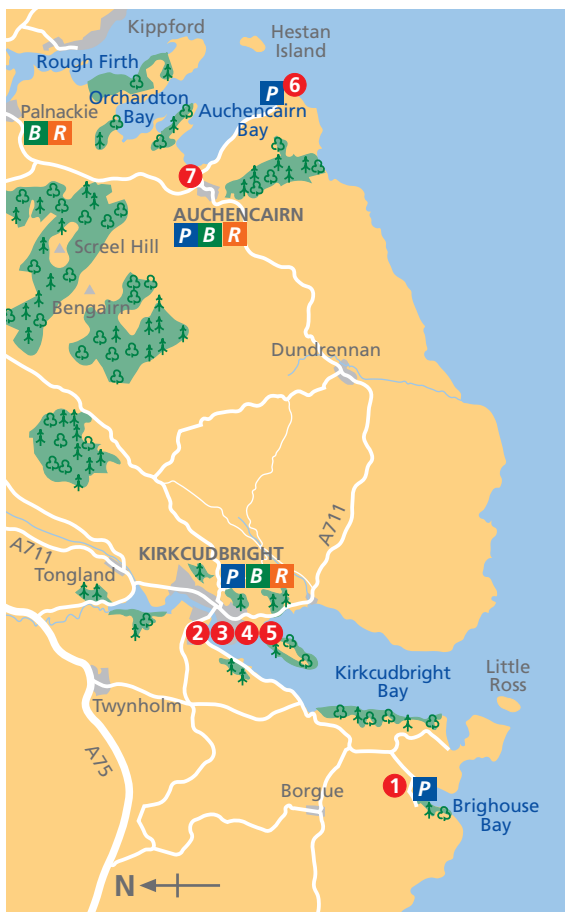
Kirkcudbright, Auchencairn and the surrounding countryside have long been great places to discover on foot. The rugged coastline offers superb views across the Solway to the Lake District together with the chance of spotting razorbills, fulmars and kittiwakes among others. To the north west of Auchencairn, Scree Hill (343m/1126ft) dominates the background together with its neighbour Bengairn (391m/1290ft). Both these hills provide a backdrop to the outstanding scenery of this coastline, part of which has been designated a National Scenic Area.



Nesting Fulmar

THE WALKS

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Route information

- A brief description, approximate distances and times are given for each route.
- Paths are graded for people of reasonable mobility as easy, moderate, strenuous or very strenuous.
- Accessibility by wheelchair is indicated on appropriate routes.
- Please follow the guidelines given for dogs.
- As with all walks, it is a good idea to take weatherproof clothing and stout footwear.

The orange-covered OS Explorer 1:25 000 maps (No 312 & 313) cover this area in detail.



Brighthouse Bay

Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work.

- Leave gates as you find them.
- Keep dogs under close control at all times.
- Keep to paths across farmland.
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls.
- Respect farm livestock, crops and machinery.
- Take your litter home with you.
- Take care on country roads.
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees.
- Guard against risk of fire.
- Make no unnecessary noise.

Take particular care on the shore – the Solway Firth can be deceptive, with fast tides, strong currents and deep hidden channels.



View over cliffs to Meikle Ross

Circular coastal and farmland walk

5.5km/3½ miles or 7km/4½ miles,
depending on route

Allow 1 to 3 hours depending on route

Hard surface track and path, grass path and
minor road. Ladder stiles and kissing gates.

Moderate

Boots recommended.

PARKING is available at the Brighouse Bay car park, approximately 5 miles south-west of Kirkcudbright. From Kirkcudbright, take the B727 towards Borgue. Follow signs to Brighouse Bay then to the car park and toilets.

START Walk to the far end of the car park until you come to a small wooden barrier with an arrow pointing ahead. Continue to follow the path, bearing right and take the first path on the left, before you reach the caravan park. This takes you into Graplin Plantation where oak, beech and sycamore predominate. In summer, chiff chaffs and willow warblers add to the resident bird population. There is also a wealth of wildflowers such as red campion, wild garlic and wood sorrel to be seen in spring and summer. There are many minor paths that take you down to the shore but for the purpose of this walk, continue to follow the main path.

The path leaves the wood and goes along the rocky shore, next to the golf course. This part of the



coastline is part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest due to the quality and variety of the habitats, for example it is the only place in Scotland where perennial flax can be found. Lizards, slow-worms and adders can sometimes be spotted amongst the grasses or soaking up the heat on rocks in the morning. Watch out for kestrels hovering above, waiting to snatch their prey. Out at sea porpoises and basking sharks may make an appearance. There is always something to see and on a clear day you can see the Isle of Man or across Wigtown Bay to The Machars, a quiet, picturesque peninsula in the west of the region.



Perennial flax



Common lizard

Continue following the coastal path until you come to a kissing gate then a stile. This takes you into farmland where the walk leaves the coast. In summer, listen out for the high, melodic song of the skylark. Flocks of finches are another welcome sight, especially since they and other farmland birds are declining. Rocky outcrops and gorse give the landscape a rugged feel and the strong winds coming in from the sea give hawthorns their windswept look. Following the arrows, you soon reach a field

which has a viewpoint and bench. There are wonderful views out to sea and to the north-west, the modest peaks of Cairnharrow (456m/1496ft) and Ben John (337m/1105ft) dominate the landscape.

Shortly after the viewpoint, you reach another stile, taking you onto a track. Here you have the option of taking a shorter route back to the car park.

View to Borness Point



OPTION - If you wish to take the shorter route, turn right when you reach the track then follow the waymarkers through Southpark Farm steading, past the caravan site and straight on back to the car park.

To do the full walk, go straight across the track, following the waymarkers. As you head inland, you pass an area of wetland – Cairniehill Loch. It is best to stay close to the fence line here where the ground is drier. The most obvious plant

associated with the loch is lesser bulrush with its big, brown spikes. Also, look out for the large gold-ringed



Gold-ringed dragonfly

dragonfly hunting for insects hovering above the surface or along the margins of the loch. Swallows and grey wagtails take advantage of the wealth of insects and can be seen swooping or darting to catch them in mid flight.

The path soon meets a farm track that you follow uphill, bearing right. Stay on the track and follow the waymarkers which take you through Cairniehill Farm steading and onto a minor road. Follow the road downhill and cross two stiles to reach the car park where you started.



View over River Dee to Cumstoun House

Linear riverside and woodland walk with loop

7.5km/4½ miles

Allow 2½ hours

Beaten earth, hard surface and grass paths, minor road and roadside pavement. Stiles.

Moderate

Stout shoes or boots recommended

PARKING is available at the Harbour Square car park in the centre of Kirkcudbright.

START from the car park. Leave the entrance opposite the Post Office and turn left, heading for Kirkcudbright Bridge. This bridge was constructed in 1926 to replace an iron structure. Before the bridge was built, the River Dee was crossed by ferry which, because of the tidal nature of the water here and the very strong currents, could be difficult and dangerous. Staying on this side of the river,

cross over Bridge Street onto the Dee Walk straight ahead. Follow this along the river through the park area where, at the end, you will cross a bridge over the Boreland Burn. Turn left on to the flood bank protecting the low lying fields to your right.

Otter





If you go quietly along your way, you are likely to see a great number of birds, including estuarine feeders such as oystercatcher, curlew, redshank and grey heron. Depending on the time of year, you are also likely to see duck species such as tufted duck and goldeneye. There will nearly always be a cormorant looking for good fishing and there is also the chance of seeing an otter. As you round the bend to where the Tarff Water joins the River Dee, there are extensive reed beds. These are an attractive safe haven for wildlife, including sedge warblers which can be heard chattering amongst the reeds in summer. Looking across the water, the rather grand red sandstone house you can see is Cumstoun House, a private dwelling. In its grounds is the ruin of Cumstoun Castle, a tower house built around the 15th Century.

- 12 Continuing along the path, you enter a riverside woodland. This change in environment brings in small birds such as blue and great tits, great spotted woodpeckers, treecreepers and the ubiquitous wren.

Tongland Bridge



Once you reach Tongland Bridge, carefully cross the road and climb the stile at the other side. The path takes you along the riverside, where you have a view of the bridge. Tongland Bridge was built from a design by Thomas Telford, the famous road and bridge builder, at a cost of some £7000. The first foundations, laid in 1804, were washed away and the following year work was restarted and the bridge completed and opened in 1808. As the river at this point has a remarkable tidal rise of some 20 feet, each of the bridge approaches has three tall flood arches to assist the flow of water at high tides. The remains of the old railway bridge can be seen upstream.

Continue alongside the river, passing under the arch of the old railway bridge, with Tongland Power Station in front of you. Further upstream from here is the Tongland Dam and reservoir. Beyond the railway arch, follow the path



Tongland Power Station

alongside the river and into a strip of woodland. The path meanders through the woodland and comes out at Tongland Old Bridge, over the old river bed of the Dee. Cross the bridge and walk up the minor road to join the A711. Turn left and walk along the pavement towards the Power Station. There is a visitor centre here with an exhibition, refreshments and guided tours (telephone 01557 330114 for details of times and admission charges).

Follow the pavement past the visitor centre back to Tongland Bridge where you can retrace your steps along the Dee Walk.



Kirkcudbright Harbour



Circular forest walk

3.5km/2miles

Allow 1 hour

Roadside pavement, beaten earth and hard surface paths.

Easy

Stout shoes or boots recommended

PARKING is available at the Harbour Square car park in the centre of Kirkcudbright. There is also limited parking available at the entrance to Barhill Wood, just off the B727.

START from the car park. Leave the entrance opposite the Post Office and turn right then left. On reaching St Mary Street, go straight across and follow the road uphill. The road bears left then takes you out of town until you reach a very sharp corner where the road goes left to Gelston. Go straight ahead here and the entrance to the woods is first on your right. There are three routes through the wood. The





one described here is called the Viewpoint Walk and is waymarked throughout as yellow.

From the car park, take the right hand path. Barhill is an ancient woodland site and has a mix of trees including oak, beech, larch, holly and sycamore. There is also plenty of undergrowth and you will probably hear the rustlings of blackbirds and song thrushes as they search for worms. Also listen out for the drumming of the great spotted woodpecker. The less obvious inhabitants of the wood include voles, mice, squirrels and an abundance of moths, beetles and other insects.

Soon you will reach a viewpoint with a picnic bench. Here you can enjoy views over Kirkcudbright Bay and the Galloway Hills beyond. To continue, follow the yellow waymarkers. These take you through the wood where there are further glimpses over the town and across the Bay. Barhill sits high above Kirkcudbright, away from the hustle and bustle of the busy town. The walk is peaceful and relaxing, with only birdcalls to interrupt the quiet.



View to Little Ross

Linear coastal walk

14km/8½ miles

Allow 4 to 5 hours

Roadside pavement, minor road, hard surface track and grass paths. Stile.

Moderate to strenuous

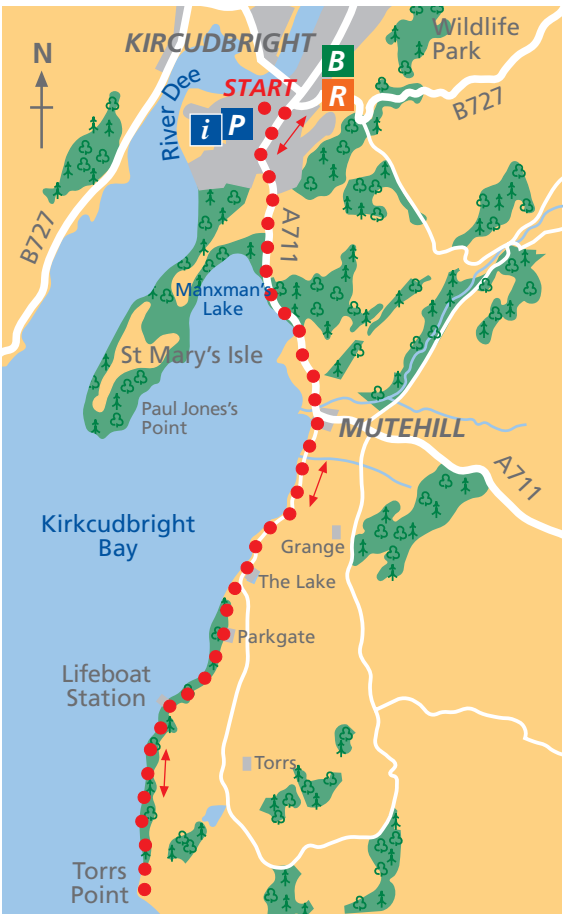
Stout shoes or boots recommended

PARKING is available at the Harbour Square car park in the centre of Kirkcudbright.

START from the car park. Leave the entrance opposite the Post Office and turn right then left. On reaching St Mary Street, walk out of town, following the A711 going south to Dundrennan and Auchencairn, along the roadside pavement. This road follows the coast until it reaches Mutehill. There are benches along the way and a few points where you can leave the road and get access to the shore. Immediately across the bay you will see St. Mary's Isle which is not really an island but a peninsula. Towards the end of this peninsula is Paul Jones's Point, named after John Paul Jones

View to Ross Bay





– the first hero of the American Navy. It was on St Mary's Isle in 1778 that he attempted to capture the Earl of Selkirk. His plan was to exchange him for captured American sailors but he was unsuccessful since the Earl was in England at the time.

Oystercatcher



- 18 The mudflats (known as Manxman's Lake) between St. Mary's Isle and the road are a great spot for watching waders and geese. Birds you have a good chance of spotting are oystercatcher, curlew, redshank, dunlin, common sandpiper (summer), shelduck and mute swans. There is always the chance that a bird of prey will fly over so keep your eyes open.



Dunlin

Continuing on from here, you will soon reach Mutehill. Take the minor road to the right. This quiet road takes you along the shore where you can enjoy uninterrupted views over the Bay. After about a mile you reach a group of houses and a fork in the road. Leave the road, taking the right fork and follow the track which continues alongside the shore. This takes you through a strip of woodland to the Lifeboat Station. The original lifeboat house was situated

View across Kirkcudbright Bay





Little Ross

at the Creekhead in Kirkcudbright, where the boat had to be hauled on a wheeled carriage down the street to the quay. A new boathouse and slipway were constructed in 1892 to make life easier and improve response times. However, it was not until the 1950s that a road through the woods was made. Before this, the crew had to make their way through rough woodland for almost a mile before they could get to the boathouse.

From the Lifeboat Station, continue along the track through the wood, heading for the next stage of the walk – Torrs Point. Where the main track curves back round to the Lifeboat Station, take the grassy track straight ahead. This takes you through the woodland, keeping close to the shore where there are many opportunities to glimpse the stunning coastline. Soon you come to a stile which takes you into a field. Turn right and follow the edge of the field and you will arrive at the cliff top. The path then continues along the edge of the cliff top, with extensive views across Kirkcudbright Bay to the Wigtownshire coast, the Isle of Man and the Cumbrian Coast. The island in the foreground with its lighthouse is Little Ross.

Once you reach Torrs Point and have enjoyed the view and had a well-earned rest, you can then retrace your steps to Kirkcudbright.



Circular coastal and countryside walk

8.5km/5miles

Allow 3 to 4 hours

Roadside pavement, verge and minor roads

Moderate

Stout shoes recommended

PARKING is available at the Harbour Square car park in the centre of Kirkcudbright.

START from the car park. Leave the entrance opposite the Post Office and turn right then left. On reaching St Mary Street, turn right and walk out of town. Follow the A711 going south to Dundrennan and Auchencairn, along the roadside pavement. This road meanders alongside the coast until it reaches Mutehill. There are benches along the way and a few points where you can leave the road and get access to the shore where there are plenty of opportunities to spot waders such as oystercatcher and curlew on the mudflats.





There are views over to St. Mary's Isle and Ross Island at the mouth of Kirkcudbright Bay.

Before you reach Mutehill you will notice Black Moray Wood on your left. Also known as Black Morrow Wood, it is the site of the Black Morrow Well. Rumour has it that a gipsy chief, greatly feared by the locals and known as Black Murray, lived in this wood. Young MacLellan of Bombie, in order to recover his father's lands, filled a well beside Murray's cave in the wood with spirits. Murray drank from it then fell asleep. MacLellan seized the opportunity, jumped from his hiding place and chopped off Murray's head. He then brought it on the point of his sword to King James II and so secured the reward promised for the death of Black Murray and the defeat of the gypsies.



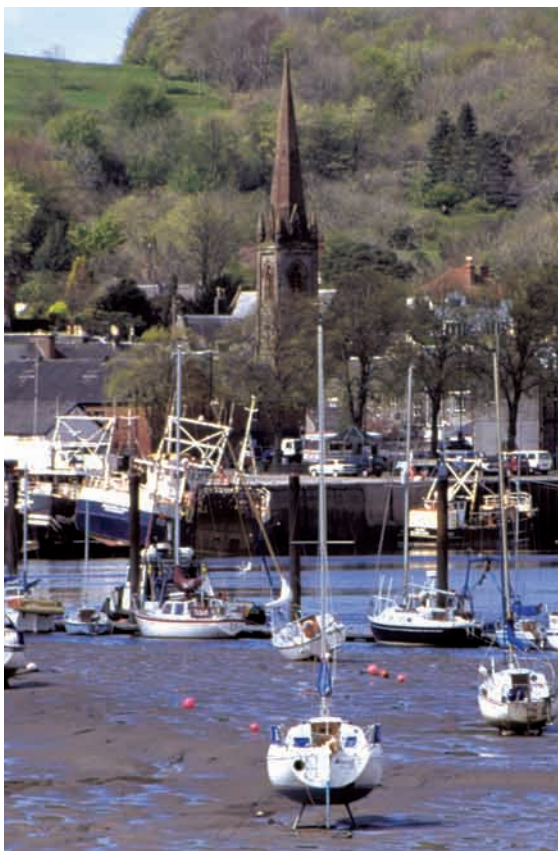
Once you reach Mutehill, the pavement ends. Turn left over the bridge and walk along the A711 for a short while before turning left onto the minor road. This quiet road follows the Buckland Burn along a wooded glen, which is in sharp contrast to the estuarine environment you have just left. At dusk you may get glimpses of roe deer, foxes and rabbits. Various woodland birds can be seen such as blue, great and coal tits and long-tailed tits which forage in large parties outwith the nesting season. Because of their high-pitched call, these birds can very often be heard long before they are seen. Greatspotted woodpecker, treecreepers, jay and tawny owl are all to be seen in this type of habitat.

Continue on up the Buckland Glen. If your visit is in the spring time, the roadside verges are carpeted with pungent smelling wild garlic



which will be followed by foxgloves, red campion and numerous white umbellifers such as cow parsley and hogweed. When you arrive at Buckland Bridge, take a left turn which takes you back to Kirkcudbright up a rather twisting (to begin with), quiet country lane. When you meet the road to Gelston, after about a mile, watch out for the cemetery on your right. It is here that Billy Marshall, 'The Caird of Barullion and King of Galloway Tinkers' was laid to rest at the age of 120 years. His many adventures and polygamous marriages not seeming to do him any harm at all! It is all down hill from the High Kirkland Cottage to the town.

Kirkcudbright harbour





Circular coastal clifftop, farmland and forest walk

2.5km/1 1/2 miles to 7.5km/5miles

Allow 1 to 4 hours depending on route

Grass paths and hard surface paths and tracks. Kissing gates.

Easy to strenuous depending on route

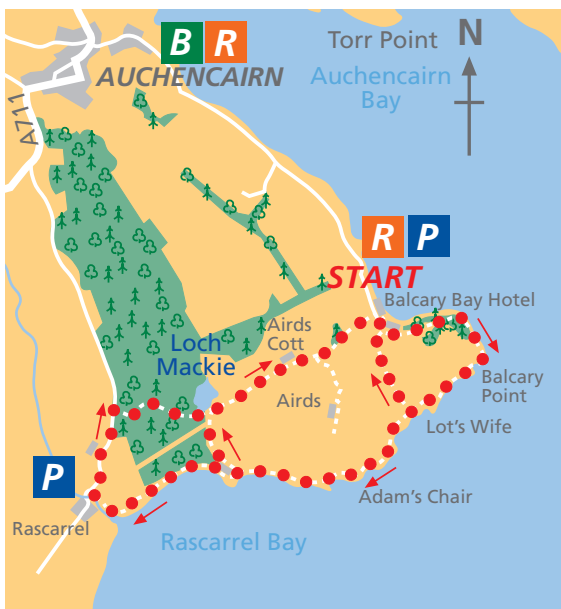
Boots recommended

This is a very popular coastal walk starting not far from Auchencairn village. There are many options available so you can vary the time

and distance walked.

PARKING is available in the car park just past Balcary Bay Hotel. To get there from Auchencairn, follow the signs for Balcary which take you down a narrow road for 2 miles. You will pass the Bowling Green on your left and





soon the views over the bay open up and Hestan Island is prominent to the south east. The road terminates at the car park where an information board tells you about the area.

START from the car park. At the far end there is a track signed Balcary Point and Rascarrel. Follow this for about 150 yards until you reach a kissing gate and a further sign to the right of the gate. Go through the kissing gate and bear left, following the track along the edge of the field. Take time to enjoy the views over Auchencairn Bay and back towards Scrael and Bengairn. Very often there are sheep or cattle in this field so dogs must be kept under close control.

Go through the kissing gate at the end of the field and along the path which passes along the edge of the woodland. The path takes you past Boat House, the former Lifeboat Station, and eventually brings you out onto the gentle slopes of Balcary Point.

26 Depending on the time of year, the grassland flowers here include violets, primroses, heath spotted orchid and birdsfoot trefoil. Continue to follow the path round. You are now approaching the higher cliff-top section of the path. In May and June the upper parts of the cliffs are alive with nesting sea birds jostling and noisily contesting for prime sites. On the lower slopes guillemots, razorbills and kittiwakes make their home. There are also many cormorants nesting – you will probably hear, or smell them before you see them.



Guillemots

In spring you cannot help but notice the wildflowers which cling to the cliffs, creating a



Thrift

profusion of colour. These hanging gardens are made up mainly of sea campion, thrift, which forms dense cushions, scurvy grass and the low growing and creeping stonecrop and birdsfoot trefoil.

OPTION 1 - When you reach the metal kissing gate, you can

if you wish return to Balcary by the permissive path kindly provided by the farmer.

To continue the walk follow the path down on to the shore at a point near the ruined buildings of an old barytes mine. Continue until you reach the cottages where another option becomes available.

OPTION 2 - Head up right, behind the cottages and follow the path to Loch Mackie. Turn right at the end and after about a mile you will be back at Balcary.



Those who are carrying on to Rascarrel should bear left in front of the cottages and follow the track round to the car park at Rascarrel. Do not cross the burn but follow the wooded track up to the public road where a right turn is made. After about half a mile watch out for a signpost on the right to Loch Mackie and Balcary. Turn in through the gates and keep to the track, which bears left, then take the first track on the right. Follow this, bear left where an arrow is pointing to Loch Mackie. At times, detours may be in place due to forestry operations.

This brings you to the footbridge over the outlet from the loch. It is possible to see mallard and tufted duck on the loch and there is usually the odd cormorant around looking for good fishing. This loch is man-made and your route lies across the top of the dam – through the kissing gate and straight on for your return to Balcary.

View from Rascarrel to Balcary cliffs





Linear coastal walk

7.5km/4½ miles

Allow 3 to 4 hours

Roadside pavement and verge, hard surface track and grass path. Cattle grids.

Moderate

Stout shoes or boots recommended

PARKING is available in the Square, in the centre of Auchencairn village, although spaces are limited.

START from the car park. Follow the main Dalbeattie road downhill. Cross the bridge and walk out of the village, past the war memorial, for about a mile and a half. Watch out for a white cottage (Rigg of Torr) on the right which is set back from the main road. Turn right here and follow the track round the edge of the field. Following the signposts to the beach you will soon reach Old Torr Cottage. Go through the gate, follow the faint track then cross the field to reach the kissing gate in the far corner. This gate leads straight onto Red Haven Bay, known locally as “Reid Ha’en”.





Before you cross the field, it is worth mentioning the bird hide, hidden amongst the trees and bushes. To get there, continue along the track, past the beach where you will see a wood up ahead. Cross a stile in the fence here and a short walk takes you to the bird hide. This unusual building was designed and built by an artist formerly resident at the nearby Orchardton House. He enlisted the help of local schoolchildren to build it and used natural materials, all sourced locally. Straw has been used to fill the walls and whole tree trunks cut up to form the geometrically designed roof. It is well worth a look and, because the hide is set in the woods but also looks out onto the Bay, there is an opportunity to spot a wide range of wildlife, from oystercatchers and cormorants to great tits and woodpeckers. To get to the beach from here simply retrace your steps and cross the field to the kissing gate.

Red Haven is a wonderful, small and secluded bay with fabulous views out to the larger Auchencairn Bay. To your left is Torr Point and

Hestan Island is in front of you. Hestan (or Heston as it used to be called) is famous for its connection with S R Crockett's story *The Raiders* in which it is called Rathan Isle. There is a history of smuggling in the area and a great deal of it was going on in the late 18th Century. Nowadays, Hestan is quiet and uninhabited apart from large colonies of nesting gulls, other nesting seabirds and a flock of sheep. In the past, the cottage on the island has had many



Elephant Rock

tenants and used to house the lighthouse keeper. The lighthouse itself was established in 1893 after complaints about the number of boats being wrecked. However, the light was found to be insubstantial and was replaced several

years later. It is still in use today, although it is now automated. Not far from the cottage, the traces of the workings of a 19th Century copper mine can be seen on the slope above the naturally formed Elephant Rock, so called because of its uncanny resemblance to an elephant.

Once you have enjoyed your rest and relaxation at Red Haven you can return to your starting point by retracing your steps.

Hestan Island





Balcary Bay and Hestan Island

Particular thanks to Auchencairn Initiative, Skye House, Kirkcudbright and Forest Enterprise.

Photographs by Keith Kirk and Richard Mearns, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board.



A Message from the Health Improvement Group
Walking can seriously improve your health & happiness. Enjoy!

WALKING

in and around

Kirkcudbright & Auchencairn



FIND OUT MORE...

This booklet is part of a series for walkers and cyclists, covering Dumfries & Galloway.

For further information about public transport, accommodation, eating out, events and attractions contact:

Dumfries & Galloway Tourist Board
t 01387 253862

The Travel Line
t 0870 608 2608

www.visit-dumfries-and-galloway.co.uk
info@dgtb.visitscotland.com

For further information about the history and natural heritage of the area contact:

Forest Enterprise Ranger Service
t 01387 860247

Dumfries & Galloway Council
Ranger Service
t 01556 502351