

WALKING

in and around

Castle Douglas



The natural place to walk





Castle Douglas and the surrounding countryside are ideal for the walker. Its close proximity to the coast, neighbouring forests and hills make it a great area to explore. The rich history of the town goes back at least to the Iron Age, when settlements on artificial islands, known as crannogs, were built in Carlingwark Loch.

The scenery and wildlife make walking a pleasure in this area. From the tall douglas firs in Doach Wood to the butterflies at Threave Gardens in the summer, these walks will take you through a wide variety of habitats including woodland, marshes, farmland, wetland and moorland, all of which are within easy reach of Castle Douglas. In spring and summer, there is an abundance of wildflowers and butterflies to enjoy. In winter you are treated to the spectacle of huge flocks of geese in and around Threave Estate. Loch Ken/River Dee, also notable for its wildfowl, is set in one of the most scenic and unspoilt parts of Galloway and is designated a Regional Scenic Area.

Parts of some walks are along roads. These are mostly B-class or unclassified minor roads, but there are a few short sections or crossings of A-class roads. Due care and attention should be paid on all on-road sections.



THE WALKS

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View over Solway Firth from Screel



Route information

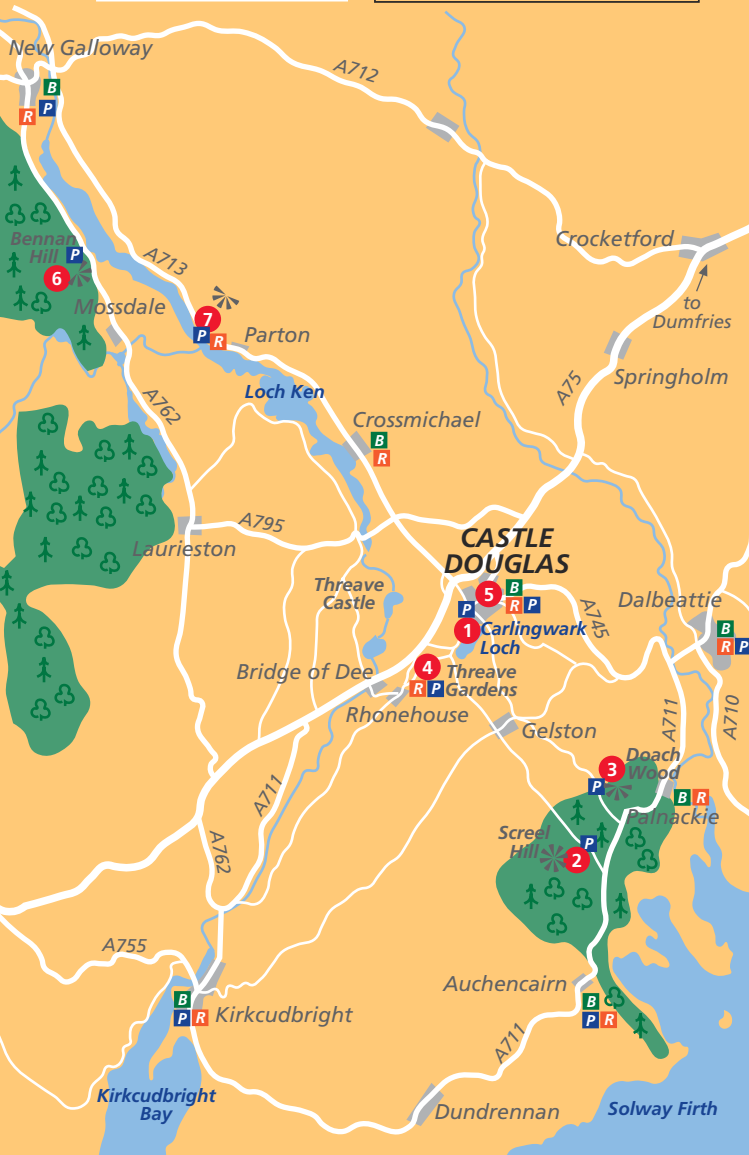
- A brief description, approximate distances and times are given for each route.
- Paths are graded for people of reasonable mobility as easy, moderate, strenuous or very strenuous.
- Accessibility by wheelchair is indicated on appropriate routes.
- Please follow the guidelines given for dogs.
- As with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

The orange covered OS Explorer 1:25 000 map (No 312 and 320) covers this area in detail.

Location Map



- 1 Walk Start Points
- Walking route
- - - Footpath or track
- Road
- 🌳 View Point
- B Public transport link point
- P Car parking
- R Refreshments (pub, hotel, café)





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 special 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.





Circular walk through farmland

5.6km/3½ miles

Allow 2 hours

Roadside pavement, minor roads and grass paths

Moderate

Stout shoes recommended

START from the lochside park and turn onto Whitepark Road. Turn right and follow the road south past the cemetery and towards Gelston. Turn right at the 'Footpath' sign at Cuckoo Bridge and follow the path over the boardwalk then through a fenced off footpath to the minor road near Mid Kelton. The boardwalk crosses marshland which is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest for its wildlife. Areas of semi-natural woodland occur within the marshland, supporting lichens, fungi and breeding songbirds. When you are on the boardwalk, don't miss the opportunity to spot wildlife. Look for water beetles in open water and spiders scurrying over the boards. The boardwalk also provides the chance to admire the landscape of the area with good views of the nearby hills of Screel and Bengairn.

At the end of the countryside path turn right onto the road and continue past the Douglas Mausoleum and Threave Gardens. The Douglas Mausoleum was built around 1830 to house the remains of William Douglas and the Douglas family. In 1792 Sir William, acting under a Royal Charter, changed the name of the small village of Causewayend to Castle Douglas. Return to Castle

Douglas using the pavement/cycle path along the side of Carlingwark Loch. The loch is renowned for its birdlife, including coots, mute swans, tufted duck, shoveler and great crested grebe.

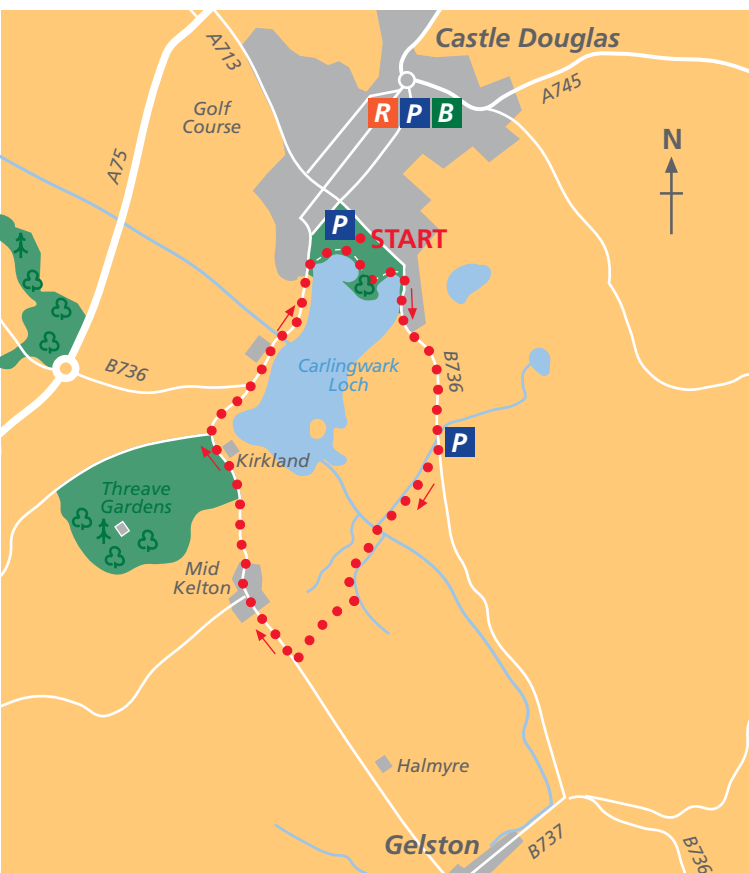
An information board is located at the park to help you with identification. In the 1860s two fishermen hooked a large bronze cooking pot full of old bits and pieces of metalwork,



Coot

which are now on view in the Scottish National Museum in Edinburgh. Decorations on some of the objects showed them to have been used at the time when Roman armies were in the area some 1800 years ago.

A separate leaflet is also available about the loch.





Circular forest and upland walk

5.6km/3½ miles

Allow 2½ hours

Hard surface tracks. Also beaten earth and rough grassland which are soft and steep in places

Strenuous

Boots essential

PARKING is available at the small Forest Enterprise car park on the minor road between Gelston and Auchencairn, approximately 10.5km/6 miles south of Castle Douglas. NX800547.

At 1126ft (344m), Screel Hill is smaller than its neighbour Bengairn. However, it provides an excellent, short hill walk with some fantastic views. Despite its relatively low height, conditions at the top may be far worse than at the car park so warm clothing, a map and a compass are advisable.

START from the car park. The route is waymarked from here. Follow the road uphill until the path leaves the track and enters the forest on the left. Here the ground gets rougher underfoot and the path gets steeper. Continue to follow the waymarkers and soon you come out of the forest into an area of heather and bracken with rocky outcrops. Listen for the distinctive croaking of ravens as they soar above you and watch out

for red grouse, which you might come across along the way. Follow the well-worn path to the top of the hill where, on a clear day, you can get spectacular panoramic views. To the north east is the Queensberry range and to the north west you can see Cairnsmore of Carsphairn and the Rhins of Kells. There are also views over the Solway Firth. Auchencairn Bay and Orchardton Bay are in the foreground,



Red Grouse



12 along with Hestan Island. This island lies midway between Almorness and Balcary Points and is joined to the mainland at Almorness by a causeway. Looking across the Solway, see if you can pick out the towns of Silloth, Maryport,



Scree Hill

Workington and Whitehaven which lie from left to right along the Cumbrian coastline. You should also be able to pick out the high peaks of Skiddaw, Grasmoor, Great Gable and Scafell Pike!

From here, follow the path along to the Cairn at the other end where you can look across to Bengairn. Scree Hill

Hill and its neighbour Bengairn dominate this part of the Solway coast. The path then heads downhill into the forest, through a natural archway and soon joins a forest track that takes you back to the path you started on. You can then retrace your steps to the car park.





Circular woodland walk

3km/2 miles

Allow 1 1/2 hours

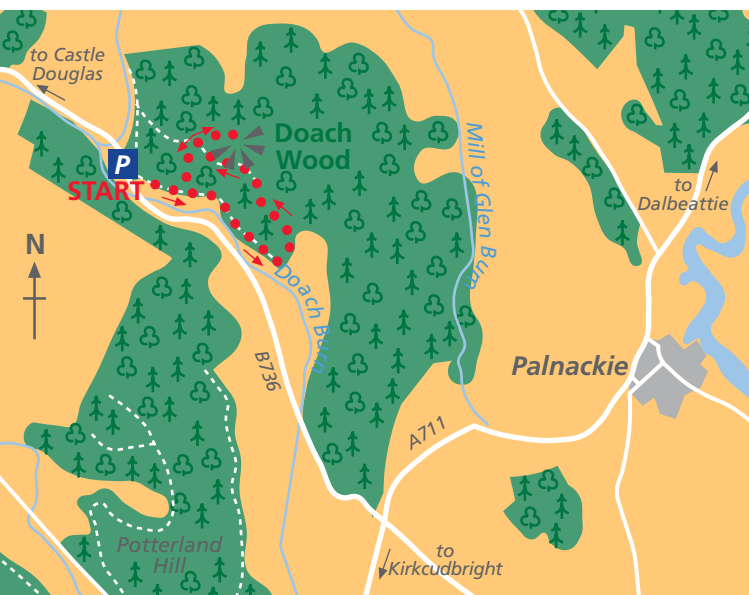
Beaten earth, hard surface track, steep in places

Moderate

Boots recommended

PARKING is available at the small Forest Enterprise car park on the B736, approximately 4 miles south of Castle Douglas. NX794579.

START from the car park. The route is waymarked and easy to follow from here. There are two routes in the wood but the one described here is the yellow route. The path skirts around the edge of the wood to begin with, past mature douglas firs, before it turns to go uphill. The



effort to reach the viewpoint is rewarded with a fine vista stretching out across the Solway to the Lake District hills. Hestan Island, at the mouth of Balcary Bay, is visible in the foreground. The viewpoint often also provides close encounters with soaring buzzards at eye level or below. Listen too for the laughing call of the green woodpecker.



Green Woodpecker

The name Doach is a late

18th century local name for a salmon trap or weir. It is derived from the Gaelic 'datschach', meaning vat or tub. Today douglas fir is the dominant tree in much of the lower part of the wood. First discovered by the Scottish explorer Archibald Menzies, in North America in 1791, but named after another Scot David Douglas, who sent seeds to Britain in 1825. The magnificent specimens at Doach stand over 40 metres (130 feet) high.



Bluebells



Circular farmland and woodland walk with optional detours to Lamb Island bird hide, Threave Castle and bird hides

4km/2¹/₂ miles to 12.5km/7¹/₂ miles depending on detours

Allow 1¹/₂ hours, or more for detours

Minor roads, beaten earth, hard surfaced grass tracks and paths. Steps in places

Moderate to strenuous depending on detours taken

Boots or stout shoes recommended

PARKING Free parking is available at the Estate Walk car park at the rear entrance to Threave Gardens NX755608. No charges apply to the walk.

Threave Estate is managed by the National Trust for Scotland and was gifted to the Trust in 1948 by Major Gordon. It consists of around 6000ha (1500acres) of tenanted farmland, woodland and wetland. The Castle is managed by Historic Scotland.

START from the car park. The route is marked with yellow arrows. Go through the kissing gate at the end, cross the road then follow the path between the houses



towards the A75 roundabout. This section was once the main drive to Kelton Mains, the principal house of the Estate prior to the construction of Threave House.

Where the route meets the road, walk along the top of the banking for about 100 metres before carefully crossing a busy road onto the farm track opposite. This leads you over the A75 and into a wood. From the path through the wood you will get good views of drumlins, small rounded hills formed during the last ice age, which are common around Castle Douglas. During the winter months you may also see geese grazing on some of these hills and in nearby fields. Roe deer are common around the Estate, but are shy and easily disturbed. Watch for their white rumps as they bound away through the undergrowth, or listen for their barking, particularly heard at dusk.

From here the route follows the line of the disused railway, which carried steam trains between Castle Douglas and Kirkcudbright from 1861 to 1965. After the first stone bridge, there is a

detour to Threave Castle and bird hides. The Castle was built around 1369 by the Third Earl of Douglas 'Archibald the Grim'. This massive tower stands on an island in the River Dee, but can be reached during the summer by the small boat operated by Historic Scotland's custodian. If you wish to take this detour, follow the blue arrows then retrace your steps and continue the estate walk at the point where you left it. The Lamb Island bird hide is a fabulous place to spot waterfowl at any time of the year. Also, large numbers of greylag and pink-footed geese can be seen grazing on fields on the



Pink-footed geese

Estate in winter. When these birds take off the result is truly spectacular and a classic winter sight here. Back on the estate walk, before the second stone bridge, turn right and go up some wooden steps onto the road. Turn left and continue onto the bridge over the A75. Alternatively you may wish to continue a further 0.75km (1/2 mile) down the railway line to visit a bird hide on an island on the River Dee, but you will need to retrace your steps to rejoin the Estate Walk.

Beyond the bridge over the A75 the route is waymarked through woodland and farmland. Take care in crossing the minor road after the first footbridge, and in following the minor road back to the Gardens after the second footbridge.





Circular town walk

2.5km/1 1/2 miles

Allow 1 hour

Roadside pavements

Easy

Any appropriate footwear

PARKING is available at the Tourist Information Centre at Market Hill car park. NX767626.

START from the car park. Proceed onto King

Street, the town's main shopping area, keeping a look out for the 'Castle Douglas Pig'! It appears on the stonework of a house in King Street (see photo for a clue).

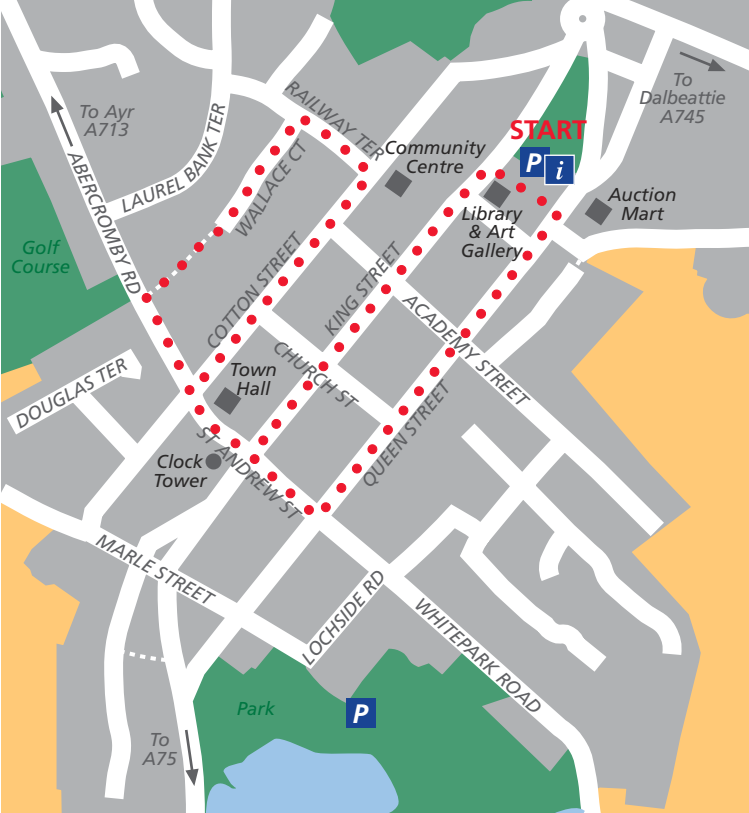


Castle Douglas Pig

As you leave the car park, the Art Gallery is on your left. Directly opposite this, on the other side of the street, is the Imperial Hotel. Known formerly as the Globe Inn, it had facilities to stable horses until the 1920's when they were superseded by



Castle Douglas Townscape



buses. Similar facilities were also provided at the Douglas Arms, towards the bottom of King Street. Note the sign on its wall which dates from cattle droving days and shows distances to various towns and cities.

If you visit the town between May and July you will hear the screaming calls of swifts overhead. It is believed that when young swifts fly from their nest, usually under the eaves of buildings, they never land again until they are old enough to breed – some two years later!

Next, turn right at the Douglas Arms into St. Andrew Street and walk to the Town Hall. Built in 1862, its frontage bears the town emblem, a heart with wings. This relates to the story of how Robert the Bruce's heart was carried into battle by Sir James Douglas who threw it forward saying, "Forward dear heart, as thou would want tae dae. Douglas will follow thee."

- 22 Continue along the street to the junction and turn right into Cotton Street. William Douglas built a cotton mill in this general area in 1792, giving the street its name. The former High School, now a community centre, stands at the top of the street, opposite the street known as Railway Terrace. At the end of this road, the purpose of its name becomes clear in the left turn into Wallace Court, for this is the route of the former Stranraer to Dumfries railway line (1861–1965) which used to cut through Castle Douglas. Follow this road down then up the gentle slope to the old railway bridge at Abercromby Road, enjoying this quiet area of the town.

At the bridge, the route of the track can just be made out past the Golf Course if you cross the road to the other side of the bridge. Follow Abercromby Road down towards St John's RC church and cross Cotton Street into St Andrew Street retracing your steps to the Clock Tower, the location of the original Town Hall. The original tower, built by Sir William Douglas, was destroyed by fire in 1892 and a new one met the same fate forty years later. Henry J. Hewat of Paterson, New Jersey, USA, donated the present clock tower to Castle Douglas in May 1935, as the plaque on the wall of the tower will testify.

Cross over King Street and continue along St Andrew Street to the Kings Arms Hotel, which is believed to be around 200 years old. Turn left along Queen Street and continue up its length. This was a planned residential area of 18th century Castle Douglas. Near the top of the street is an unusual hexagonal shaped building, the auction mart. A cattle market has existed in Castle Douglas since 1819 and it is the most important industry of the town. The nearby Market Inn was once the veterinary surgeon's house. You are now back where you started at the Market Hill car park. The mound beside the Tourist Information Centre is the former bandstand.





Loch Ken

Linear forest walk with viewpoint

4.5km/3 miles (return)

Allow 1³/₄ hours

Hard surface tracks, beaten earth, some steps

Moderate

Boots or stout shoes recommended

PARKING is available at the Forest Enterprise car park approximately 5.5km/3¹/₂ miles south of New Galloway and approximately 19km/12 miles north of Castle Douglas on the A762. NX653724.

Bennan Hill is within the Galloway Forest Park and sits towards the northern end of Loch Ken. It is a small hill but one which gives unsurpassed views over the loch and the surrounding countryside. It is easily accessible, being just off the road, and can be enjoyed on its own or



as part of a tour around the loch. Loch Ken is part of the Galloway Hydro Electric Scheme which was completed in 1936. Part of it is in an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA). The area is extremely rich in wildlife, containing a variety of habitats, making it important for greylag geese, whooper swans, great crested grebes and especially its wintering flock of Greenland white-fronted geese. The surrounding woodlands also support a number of less common birds such as willow tits, wood warblers, redstarts and pied flycatchers. The loch is the most important established water skiing centre in Southern Scotland. Windsurfing, dinghy sailing, rowing and canoeing are also available from the various Marinas around the loch.



Whooper Swan

START from the car park. There are two possible routes to the viewpoint. The one described here is longer but less steep.

Follow the path off to the left until it meets the forest track. Follow the waymarkers and

Bennan Viewpoint



soon you will reach an area where mature douglas firs dominate. Continue to follow the waymarkers through the forest, listening out for the abrupt screech of a jay amongst the trees. The track turns off to the right and continues to go gradually uphill. As the path becomes slightly steeper, the views start to open out. The path soon levels out and you pass the point where the two routes meet. The viewpoint is not far from here. Once you are at the top, enjoy the wonderful views over Loch Ken to Mochrum Fell and the surrounding countryside. The viewpoint has an information board which tells you all you can expect to see in the area. On a clear day, Screel and Bengairn can be seen in the distance. You can also pick out the villages of Crossmichael and Mossdale. Keep an eye out for buzzards soaring at eye level, taking advantage of the thermals, and for red kites recently reintroduced to this part of Scotland. To return retrace your steps to the car park.



Buzzard





Linear farmland walk with viewpoint

1.75km/1 mile (return)

Allow 45 minutes

Grass path

Easy to moderate

Boots or stout shoes recommended

No Dogs

PARKING is available in the lay-by at the Loch Ken Holiday Park near Parton on the A713, approximately 11km/7 miles north west of Castle Douglas. NX 685704. The Holiday Park has a small shop, selling basic provisions and has a wide range of tourist information. It is also possible to hire boats, canoes and bikes from here. The information board in the car park has details on Loch Ken, its surroundings, facilities and wildlife.

START from the end of the lay-by nearest the Holiday Park, then carefully cross the busy A713, where the walk is signposted. The path follows the edge of the field and takes you alongside mature woodland where red squirrels may be seen scampering along branches and leaping between trees. Mature trees are also dotted throughout the field. Past these, the path steepens. Where it levels out, take the opportunity to stop and enjoy the magnificent views over Loch Ken and the distant hills. The biggest of these is Black Craig of Dee. Once you reach the top of the field, follow the path round to the right. Here you get views to the north of Parton and the undulating hills here.



Listen out for buzzards “mewing” and on a fine day, look out for them circling effortlessly upwards on the thermals. There is also a chance that you may spot a red kite. The walk ends at the main viewpoint where you can see the impressive steel girders which form Loch Ken Viaduct. These are the remains of the Castle Douglas to Portpatrick railway line, which was opened in 1862. The line was closed in 1965 as part of the Beeching cuts.

Retrace your steps to the lay-by, again making sure that you take care as you cross the busy A713.

Loch Ken view to the Galloway Hills





Threave Garden

Photographs by Keith Kirk and Richard Mearns (Dumfries and Galloway Council Ranger Service), Stephen Wiseman (National Trust for Scotland), Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board and Barbara Mearns.



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

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Castle Douglas



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

Travel Line
t 0870 608 2608

www.dumfriesandgalloway.co.uk

info@dgtb.visitscotland.com

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

The National Trust For Scotland
Ranger Service
t 01556 502575

Forest Enterprise Ranger Service
t 01387 247745

Dumfries & Galloway Council
Ranger Service
t 01556 502351