

KIRKCUDBRIGHT BAY PATHS

# A Walking Guide



Solway Firth  
  
Partnership

SCOTLAND'S SOUTHERN COAST

# Take Care

Enjoy your visit to the coast but remember to be careful.



Scottish weather can be unpredictable. Check weather forecasts and take appropriate clothing and footwear.



Scottish coasts can be rugged and remote, so tell a family member or friend where you are going and when you expect to be back.



The Solway coast has one of the biggest tidal ranges in the world. Remember to check tide times to avoid getting stranded on the sandflats or tidal bays.



The coast is bursting with life so try to avoid disturbing wildlife, particularly shore-nesting birds in spring.



The coast is beautiful. Take your litter home with you to keep it that way.



*Wreck of the Monreith*





*Kirkcudbright marina*

## Where the Dee Meets the Sea



The tidal estuary of Kirkcudbright Bay is a perfect place to explore a varied shoreline of rocky headlands, sandy bays, pebble beaches and cliffs with caves that will inspire your imagination. This guide describes three walks that will introduce the magical countryside of Kirkcudbright Bay, where you can stand in the shade of a woodland and hear the call of the curlew or feel a sea breeze while exploring an old graveyard.

Where a river meets the sea is a dynamic place with the rhythm of tides and seasons making every visit a delight. Whether you want a gentle amble around St Mary's Isle, a stroll to enjoy clifftop views from Torrs Point or a more demanding ramble through the undulating woodland on the Senwick shore, this guide helps you discover a landscape steeped in history where there are many tales to tell.

This guide is a good introduction to Kirkcudbright Bay, but do ask people who know the area for the best places to visit or get Ordnance Survey Explorer 312 map and plan your own adventure as well.

**START:**

Car park Harbour Square,  
Kirkcudbright

**OS GRID REF:**

NX 683510

**WHAT3WORDS:**

palettes.proceeds.care

**SIGN POSTED AS:**

St Mary's Isle core  
path number 151



**RATING:**

Family ★★★★★  
Adventurers ★★☆☆☆

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Old  
boathouse  
slipway

# St Mary's Isle Walk

4.5 miles

Grade: Easy



This is circular walk around the edge of  
St Mary's Isle on pavements, tracks and beaten earth paths.

Start at the Harbour Square car park and walk up St Cuthbert Street to the cross road with St Mary's Street and turn right. Pass Kirkcudbright Art Gallery on the left (where there are many fine paintings of Kirkcudbright Bay) and the Stewartry Museum on the right (where you can discover more about the area).

At the junction with Castledykes Road, branch onto a tree lined drive through a gateway between the two roads. Follow the track until you see a footpath on the right where the track bends to the left. The footpath, known as Sailor's Walk, follows the shoreline where the River Dee meets the sea.

The name St Mary's Isle is misleading because it is not an island but a narrow peninsular jutting out into Kirkcudbright Bay, named after the 12th century Augustinian Priory dedicated to St Mary. No remains of the priory can be seen today but the place name Great Cross is believed to mark the location of the main entrance to St Mary's Priory.



*St Mary's Isle walk*

St Mary's Isle became the seat of the Earl of Selkirk who built "The Isle" mansion on the site of the priory and established gardens, once considered to be "one of the loveliest spots in Scotland". The mansion house was demolished and replaced with another in 1897 which was lost to fire in the winter of 1940. The gardens fell into disuse but clumps of rhododendron and bamboo are garden escapees that are remains of exotic planting. Other reminders of past uses include the remains of a jetty at Slate Harbour and a ruined boathouse and slipway on the shore.

The path continues to the Point of the Isle where there is a small island known as the Inch - derived from *Inis* meaning island in Gaelic. From here there are views through the trees into Kirkcudbright Bay framed by wooded shores, with Little Ross island and lighthouse guarding the mouth of the estuary.

Now returning to Kirkcudbright, the bay on your right is known as Manxman's Lake, where in the days of sail the intertidal flats were often busy with vessels loading or unloading in the few hours before the tide came in and they re-floated. The name may simply refer to traders from the Isle of Man who used the area as a port, or it could refer to an event in 1507 when the Earl of Derby and a large fleet from the Isle of Man attacked and devastated Kirkcudbright.



Rocks on the shore are known as John Paul Jones's Point and refer to the memory of a remarkable event in the history of St Mary's Isle. John Paul Jones was born in Galloway and became a sailor on merchant ships but events led him to join the fledgling United States Navy during the American revolution. In 1778, as the commander of the USS Ranger, he planned an unsuccessful assault on Whitehaven. He next sailed to Kirkcudbright Bay with a plan to capture the Earl of Selkirk to hold him to ransom in exchange for American sailors. The plan was thwarted because the Earl was away. The crew took the family silver instead but it appears John Paul Jones later returned it to the family with a letter of apology. John Paul Jones later had a valiant role in a battle off Flamborough Head and is remembered today as an American Naval Hero.

At a T junction, turn right onto a track, still keeping the shore line on the right, and continue past a field with metal estate fencing. Turn right at the next T junction and follow the signposted track alongside another field to reach the road and then turn left to return to Kirkcudbright town centre.



*John Paul Jones's Point*



**START:**

Car Park Doon Beach

**OS GRID REF:**

NX 657487

**WHAT3WORDS:**

hazelnuts.tooth.dote

**SIGN POSTED AS:**

Millhall to Ross Bay  
core path number 220

**RATING:**

Family ★★★★★  
Adventurers ★★★★★

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## Senwick Shore Walk

4 miles

Grade: Moderate



This linear coastal walk to Senwick old church and back involves a short length of road verge and quiet road followed by a beaten earth path with some steep sections and a few narrow burns to cross. This woodland walk is particularly enjoyable in the morning when the sun glints on the waters of Kirkcudbright Bay. Alternative longer routes link the path to Brighthouse Bay (5 miles) or add a cliff top walk round Mickle Ross (7 miles).

Start at the car park at the popular beach known locally as the Doon on the west side of the bay, approximately 3 miles south of Kirkcudbright. The beach is shown as Nun Mill Bay on many maps but the 'unofficial' name is derived from the nearby Doon Hill where there are the earthworks of an ancient fort hidden in the woodland.

The Doon has a number of small sheltered sandy beaches between rocky outcrops and at low tide the wreck of the Monreith can be seen lying in the sands where it came to rest over 100 years ago. Beware if you visit the wreck because there are sometimes patches of sinking sands!



From the car park, walk up the hill for a short distance on the road verge and take a left turn into Mill Hall. Follow the road round to the left where it becomes a dead-end and the path is signposted between numbers 3 and 4 Mill Hall.

The beaten earth path meanders through the wooded coast with views down into Kirkcudbright Bay. Lines of boulders are all that remains of ancient fish traps at Goatwell Bay and the evocatively named Devil's Thrashing Floor where a nearby short spur path leads to a point where you can view the rugged coast.

The place name Senwick is Old Norse meaning Sandy Bay, and although the original name may have referred to a number of sandy bays in the area, the small bay named Senwick Bay has a sandy shore that is revealed at low tide. Hidden in the low cliffs is a small cave known as Carlin's Cove. Local tradition tells us that in the 1680s this cave was used as a refuge by a covenanter avoiding persecution by troops during the 'killing times'.



*Speckled wood*



In the spring the woods are full of bluebells and wild garlic. If you are lucky you may see the secretive red squirrels in the treetops. In the summer the woods are noted for the speckled wood butterfly you can see in sunny glades.

At low tide Frenchman's Rock is revealed in the bay. These rocks are believed to have been named when French smugglers raided Senwick Church and stole the silverware. As the smugglers sailed away a storm began to brew and their ship was dashed to pieces on the rocks. They all perished and the silver was lost forever.

At the end of the path you arrive at the secluded Old Senwick Church. It was abandoned in 1618 when the parish was united with Borgue, and although little is left of the old church, the graveyard continued to be used. In 1830 John McTaggart, author, poet and engineer, was buried in a family plot marked by a table stone. He was the author of the delightfully eccentric *Scottish Gallovidian Encyclopedia* which is a valuable source for local tales, terms and sayings. A reminder of the maritime location of the graveyard is the headstone of Robert Watson, lighthouse keeper on Little Ross, who drowned while returning in a small boat with provisions from Kirkcudbright.

There are paths which continue round the coast to Meikle Ross and Brighthouse Bay but the graveyard is a convenient stopping point where you can retrace your steps back to the car park at the Doon.



Old Senwick graveyard

**START:**

Car park Harbour Square,  
Kirkcudbright

**OS GRID REF:**

NX 683510

**WHAT3WORDS:**

palettes.proceeds.care

**SIGN POSTED AS:**

Torr's Point core  
path number 157

**RATING:**

Family



Adventurers



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# Torrs Point Walk

9 miles

Grade: Easy



This is a linear walk along pavements on the east side of Kirkcudbright Bay with a loop out to Torrs Point along tracks and footpath and a cliff top, returning through farmland and a minor road. An alternative shorter walk of 5 miles starts at a layby on the minor road south of Mutehill where there is limited parking available at NX682476. Please do not park on the track branching off the road. It is a private road and access is required at all time for emergency vehicles to reach the Lifeboat Station.

Start at the Harbour Square car park and walk up St Cuthbert Street to the cross road with St Mary's Street, turn right onto the A711 and follow the road out of town towards Dundrennan. Hugging the east side of Kirkcudbright Bay, the body of water first seen is known as Manxman's Lake, a bay separated from the course of the River Dee by the promontory called St Mary's Isle. The large tidal range reveals mud and sand at low tide and the intertidal flats of Manxman's Lake were firm enough for ships to be beached and loaded or unloaded before they re-floated when the tide came in.

At low tide the shimmering mud looks green because it is covered by a underwater meadow of seagrass. Seagrass, also known as eelgrass, is a unique plant that flowers underwater and is a rare habitat, as well as an important food source for ducks, geese and swans.



When the A711 turns inland, continue along the minor road along the shore past the layby where there is limited parking for those who prefer a shorter walk. Take a right turn onto a track that continues past a group of houses and through the kissing gate into woodland, which in the summer is a favourite haunt of the speckled wood butterfly.

Continue along the track until you reach the life boat station and slipway which was constructed in 1892 to replace the first lifeboat station located in Kirkcudbright. Despite the longer journey for the crew to reach the lifeboat, the new location greatly reduced the time taken to get the boat out onto the open sea.

From the lifeboat station a crushed stone path continues through the deciduous woodland passing Bathing House Bay, known locally as Lady's Bay, where a sandy beach is revealed at low tide. As you continue along the path you will see Kirkcudbright Bay open out and catch glimpses of Little Ross island and the lighthouse.



*Lifeboat station*





Gaugers Loup

The path narrows as it rises out of the woodland and you go through a kissing gate onto open fields. Turn right and follow the edge of the field to go through another kissing gate. Take care as you access the narrow path along the edge of the cliff. In the summer, the cliff tops are covered with flowers, especially the harebell, and on a still day you may see a rare northern brown argus butterfly with distinctive little white spots on chocolate coloured wings. At Torrs Point you will have a wonderful view of the mouth of Kirkcudbright Bay, Little Ross island and the hill of Miekle Ross behind.

Follow the cliff top with care, the dramatic drop is called Gaugers Loup and is the supposed location that the customs man was pushed to his death in the novel, *Guy Mannering* by Sir Walter Scott.

When you reach the white army lookout post at the entrance to the MOD Dundrennan Range, do not go through the gate but turn left and follow an indistinct path inland until you reach a farm track where you turn left and continue through the gate. Follow the track through farmland, past a small loch, and on to a gate at a minor road. Turn left and walk past Torrs Farm and down the hill to the coast. Follow the road back to your starting point.



Harebells



This guide has been produced as part of the Solway Firth Partnership Kirkcudbright Bay Views Project supported by The Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership. The Galloway Glens is a suite of projects being undertaken up and down the Ken/Dee Valley, between 2018 and 2023, connecting people to their heritage, driving economic activity and supporting sustainable communities. The Galloway Glens is primarily funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and is supported by a range of partners including Dumfries & Galloway Council and the Galloway & Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere.

