

Archaeology on the Rhins Coast Path



# South-west Rhins



# There are around 1,500 archaeological sites in the Rhins of Galloway.

This guide was created to help you discover some of the highlights as you explore the stunning Rhins coastline. There are three guides in the series.


**North Rhins Guide** covers the path from Stranraer to Portpatrick (route sections 1 and 2)

This guide (**South-west Rhins**) covers the path from Portpatrick to Mull of Galloway (route sections 3 and 4)

**South-east Rhins Guide** covers the path from the Mull of Galloway to Stranraer (route sections 5 and 6)



# Enjoy exploring the archaeology of the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path

 We have provided location information in the form of grid references for use with GPS, and what3words addresses for use with the free what3words app.

## Enjoy Scotland's outdoors responsibly

- take responsibility for your own actions
- respect the interests of other people
- care for the environment.



**KNOW THE CODE  
BEFORE YOU GO**  
outdooraccess-scotland.scot

## Please remember the following guidelines:

Archaeological monuments can be unstable and dangerous. Never climb, sit or stand on archaeological monuments or remains.

Respect all signage and fences.

Take nothing, and leave only footprints.



# Timeline of Archaeological Periods



Today's landscape bears traces of thousands of years of settlement.

The archaeology of Scotland begins after the retreat of the last ice sheet, around 12,000 years ago. There are very few visible traces of the first people who lived here (during the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic) because their lifestyles were very mobile.



# Dunskey Castle

Site 1

Perched high on a cliff, Dunskey Castle is one of the Rhins' best-known castles. What you can see today dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but there was certainly a castle here as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps even earlier. Prime locations like this were always desirable, from prehistory to the medieval period and beyond!

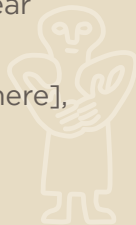
Legend has it that a secret tunnel leads from the castle down to the sea. The tunnel is said to be haunted by the ghost of an Irish piper, taken prisoner by Walter de Curry and left to starve in the dungeons. The ghost's eerie music was said to be heard for many years afterwards – so keep an ear out!

Place-name: Gaelic *dùn sgéith* [the *th* is silent here], 'fort of the portion of land jutting into the sea'.



NX 0037 5339

what3words: devoured.veto.maker



## Site 2

## Dunaldboys Motte



A small promontory to the west of Craigwoughey Hill was the site of a defended settlement in the Iron Age. Twin ramparts and ditches, visible now only at the northern end, cut off the promontory to enclose the space behind.

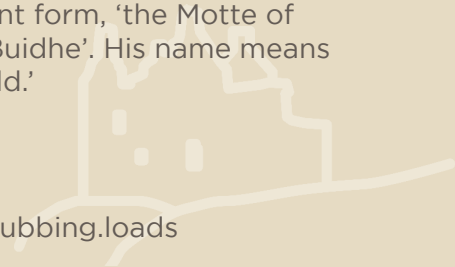
Later, in the medieval period, the site was intended for a motte, an artificial mound on which a tower was to have sat. The Iron Age defences were adjusted to produce a single flat-bottomed ditch. The upcast soil was used to create a mound within the ditch, but it seems as though the motte was never finished.

Place-name: given its present form, 'the Motte of someone called Domhnall Buidhe'. His name means 'yellow, or fair-haired, Donald.'



NX 0210 5179

what3words: treat.scrubbing.loads



# Kirklauchline Promontory Fort

## Site 3

A trio of substantial ramparts and ditches create a formidable barrier across the neck of a steep-sided promontory. A palisade may have topped this massive barrier, making it all the more imposing. The enclosure formed a defended Iron Age settlement.

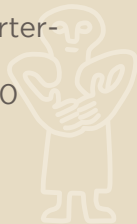
The western edge of the Rhins is scattered with promontory forts, with around 30 spread along the coast from the northern tip right down to the Mull of Galloway. Combined with evidence for hillforts, roundhouses and enclosed settlements further inland, the Rhins looks to have been a busy place in the Iron Age.

Place-name: Gaelic *ceathramh* 'quarter' or 'quarter-land' + *Lachlainn*, 'Lachlan', forming 'Lachlan's quarter'. Refers to a piece of land of around 700 acres, as recorded in the OS Name Book.



NX 0356 5058

what3words: reprints.calls.ferrets





## Site 4

# Cairnmon Fell Homestead & Hut Circles



Traces of prehistoric farming communities are found on Cairnmon Fell, visible on the ground as low, grassy banks. At the foot of a steep west-facing slope are the remains of a homestead: a hut circle 7.5m in diameter, nestled into the northern corner of an enclosure up to 26m in diameter. The hut circle marks the footprint of a roundhouse; at least two more can be found around 200m to the SSW, though they might not be contemporary with one another.

A central hearth inside each roundhouse would have provided light and heat, making for warm, comfortable homes in the Bronze Age and Iron Age.

Place-name: possibly Gaelic *càrn nam ban*, 'cairn of the women' for the first element. 'Fell', added later, is Scots, borrowed from Norse *fjall*, 'mountain'.



Homestead at NX 0482 4883  
what3words: quail.belts.copycat



# Doon Castle Broch

## Site 5

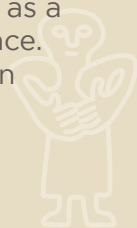
This Iron Age broch occupies a cliff-top location south of Ardwell Bay. Brochs are tall, drystone towers mainly found in the north of Scotland. They have an unusual twin-walled design with a stairwell and cells or galleries between. These hollow features reduced the weight in the walls so that they could be built taller, resulting in an impressive structure that was visible for miles around. Ultimately, though, these massive towers were the homes of farming families.

Doon Castle is unusual, not only in being an outlier in terms of its location, but also in its layout: it has two entrances where most brochs have only one. At other sites, a second entrance was sometimes added as a later modification, replacing the primary entrance. At Doon Castle, the broch appears to have been designed with two.



NX 0670 4468

what3words: lifetimes.rear.leotard



## Site 5 (cont.)

## Doon Castle Broch



This paired entrance arrangement is replicated in Iron Age roundhouses elsewhere in Galloway - another site type that typically only has one entrance - and hints at a regional style. Doon Castle was perhaps intended to emulate northern brochs while staying true to the local building traditions.

The broch was built in a dramatic, craggy location, the site of an earlier promontory fort. The route into the broch is via a narrow causeway leading over a cleft in the bedrock, allowing the people of the broch to control access. You didn't get in unless you were welcome!

Place-name: Gaelic *dùn* 'castle' + castle!



NX 0670 4468

what3words: lifetimes.rear.leotard



High on a coastal promontory are the traces of a small building with a grisly story. Legend has it that the house was home to two female wreckers who were burned for witchcraft and buried within the walls.

Wreckers collected goods washed ashore from wrecked ships, which were considered common property so long as the ship's crew and passengers were dead. Stories tell of survivors being swiftly dispatched by waiting wreckers so that they could have the ship's cargo.

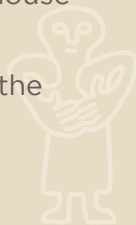
The OS Name Book suggests instead that the house was occupied by an old woman who sold ale.

Place-name: Scots *carline house*, 'the house of the old woman, crone, witch'.



NX 0988 3819

what3words: momentous.palettes.games



# Site 7

## Castle Clanyard



Image © John Pickin

This tower-house belonged to the Gordon family and was probably built in the 1500s. Only a portion of the west wall remains, and it was already ruinous by 1684, when Symson described it as “having been of old a very great house”.

A fragment of carved stone featuring a pattern of interlinked circles, built into one of the current farm buildings, was perhaps taken from the remains of the tower-house.

Place-name: early forms include *Clonlarg*, perhaps Gaelic *claon learg*, ‘inclined or squinty slope’, and *Clonzaird*, Gaelic *claon àirde*, ‘inclined height’.



NX 1085 3743

what3words: lightens.gearing.nuzzling



High on the summit of cairn Fell are the traces of a cairn some 16m in diameter, perhaps the remains of a prehistoric burial monument. Much of the stone has been taken for use elsewhere. A modern marker cairn sits on the top.

The prehistoric ritual landscape included standing stones and timber or stone circles, markers of complex belief systems. Bronze Age burial cairns consist of large piles of stones, sometimes with a kerb around the edge. The dead were buried in a crouched position in the ground beneath the cairn, or within the stone of the cairn, often within stone-lined graves called cists. Cremated remains were placed in pits or inside ceramic vessels.

Place-name: Gaelic *càrn mòr*, 'the big cairn'.



NX 1033 3613

what3words: succumbs.skins.sweated

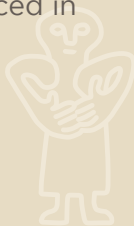


Image © Jonathan Wilkins (cc-by-sa/2.0)



## Site 9

Image © Fearann Alba



## Crammag Head

Crammag Head, a bare rocky headland topped by a small lighthouse, was once the site of a promontory fort. A single rampart and ditch cut off the promontory, enclosing the area behind. Within the fort are the remains of a broch or dun, home to a farming family in the Iron Age. You can make out the curved outline of the building on the ground on the seaward side of the lighthouse.

A lighthouse was constructed here in 1913, within the footprint of the broch/dun. The current lighthouse has been in operation since 2009.

Place-name: Crammag has at its root Old Gaelic *cromm*, 'bent, stooped, crouched, crooked'. It gives rise to modern Gaelic *cromag* 'a hook, shepherd's crook', referring to the shape of the coastline. 'Head' is English, added later.



NX 0889 3404

what3words: sizes.trinkets.supposes

# Dunman Fort

## Site 10

Image © Fearann Alba

A flat rocky summit, dizzyingly high over the coast of the Rhins, holds the remains of a fort.

A single wall encircles the landward side of the site from the north around to the south-west. The western side is by the steep drop down to the sea. The wall is reduced to a low spread of rubble today, with entrances visible at the north-east and south. A gap at the south-east is perhaps the result of the removal of stone for the building of a march dyke nearby in 1848. There are no visible features in the interior.

The site has never been excavated but perhaps dates to the Iron Age.

Place-name: Gaelic *dùn nam ban*, 'fort or hill of the women'.



NX 0978 3350

what3words: discusses.deeply.rotations







Portpatrick



# Key



Site number



Path



Beginning/end point of  
coast path route sections



NOT TO SCALE

This guide was produced by AOC Archaeology Group for the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path project, managed by Dumfries and Galloway Council.

Place-names information provided by Gilbert Márkus, Research Associate (Celtic & Gaelic), University of Glasgow.

Find out more about the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path at [\*\*dgtrails.org\*\*](https://dgtrails.org).



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