

# Where Every Place Tells a Story

Explore the stories on  
the Rhins of Galloway  
Coast Path



# A Legendary Shoreline

This guide is an introduction to some of the stories inspired by people and places on the long and varied coast of the Rhins of Galloway. Places are made from stories and by retelling the story of a place its meaning is brought to life. Explore cliffs perforated with caves, rocky promontories, pebble beaches and sandy bays that will inspire your imagination.

Stories provide meaning to landmarks, describing a place to help us find our way in the world. Most stories have origins that are lost in time, while others are a modern phenomenon, but they all tell us more about a place. They provide clues about the history of our coast, reveal what people considered noteworthy in the past and often identify places of archaeological importance.

This guide to local stories has been produced as part of the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path Project made possible with the Heritage Fund and managed by Dumfries and Galloway Council.





# Every Place Tells a Story

For thousands of years this rugged coastline has been a place of transition where danger and safety meet. In ancient times caves provided shelter from the elements, later promontory forts provided a safehaven from attack, and over time the importance of these locations has been given special significance in the collective memory. Tales remain from a time when superstitions held an important influence on the lives of local people. A time when spiritual places provided a connection with the supernatural or were places of religious pilgrimage and healing.

Explore the seashore and discover more about the Rhins of Galloway coast through stories that connect social history, local customs and ancient beliefs.

Ask people who know the area where the good places are to visit or get a detailed Ordnance Survey map and plan your own adventure. Find out more about the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path by visiting:

**[dgtrails.org](https://dgtrails.org)**



# Take Care



Enjoy your visit to the coast, but always remember to be careful especially near cliffs.



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.



There are two tides every day. Remember to check tide times to avoid getting stranded on tidal bays.



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



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

# Giant's Grave

According to local tradition a giant called Murchie was buried on a remote rocky outcrop at the northern point of the Rhins to the east of Corsewall Lighthouse. The place is said to be haunted, presumably by the ghost of the giant, and in the mid-1800s, a man digging for treasure at the outcrop took fright and, in his rush to leave, fell and broke his arm. Not long afterwards, the discovery of a grave with bones seems to have confirmed the burial story.



**O.S. map location:**

Dunmurchie nr Burnfoot NX003730



relegate.float.succeed

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## Hidden Silver

Many ships have come to grief on the Laggan or Ebbstone Rocks - a sunken reef exposed on the low (ebb) tide and marked by a beacon. In 1913 the Paulina sailing from Santander to Troon was wrecked. The crew were saved but there is a mystery about the whereabouts of the silverware from the captain's cabin. It is reputed to have been removed from the wreck by a local man who hid the silver for safe keeping in a rabbit hole. Unfortunately, there were so many holes that he forgot which one had the hidden treasure!



**O.S. map location:** Craig Laggan  
or Ebbstone NW959692



[chap remodel.tidy](http://chap remodel.tidy)

# Fairy Haunt

Castle Ban, the site of a medieval motte on a distinctive flat-topped promontory seen from the path south of Dally Bay, is said to be haunted by fairies. A local tale tells us that 3 attempts to dig for hidden treasure resulted in spooky happenings or mishap. The final attempt was interrupted by an appearance of a lady dressed all in white. She warned the treasure seekers of dire consequences and threats of vengeance if the place was ever disturbed again.

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**O.S. map location:**  
Castle Ban NW965678



[decently.lamps.essay](https://decently.lamps.essay)





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## Tragic Accident or Murder?

This cast-iron plaque on a cliff in Portobello Bay reads: JAMES DRYNAN WAS KILLED HERE 20TH JULY 1894.

A group of boys climbing the cliffs were larking around and one hurled a stone over the edge just at the point that James was climbing up. It struck his forehead and he fell onto the rocks below and died instantly from a fractured skull. The matter was regarded as an unfortunate accident by the authorities, but this opinion was not shared by everyone!



**O.S. map location:**

Portobello NW960663



limits.braced.foremost



# Healing Cave

At the head of the bay at Port Mora there are two small caves named on old Ordnance Survey maps. Dropping Cave was named after the water falling over the mouth of the cave. It was a healing cave where bathing in the water was reputed to have “kill or cure” properties. It was particularly popular for children suffering from whooping cough. Ouchtriemakain Cave was believed to have provided shelter for a hermit. In more recent times the cave has become known as Monk’s Cave.



**O.S. map location:** Port Mora (also known as Sandeel Bay) NW992551



cold.dock.landscape

5





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## Witch Resting Point

There seems to be a tradition of calling rocks after witches near Portpatrick as there are two Witch Rocks on the coast that are distinguished by the names North and South Witch Rock. To the north of the town stands a dramatic pointed stack surrounded by the sea with the second located south of Portpatrick close to Dunskey Castle. Legend has it that witches would rest on uncomfortable-looking rocks during the 'witching hour' as they travelled to or from their spooky meeting places.



**O.S. map location:**

North Witch Rock NW995542



[calculate.inert.scans](https://calculate.inert.scans)

# Dungeons and Ghosts

Dunskey Castle is reputed to be haunted by a nursemaid, who dropped a baby from one of the windows onto the beach far below and is said to appear grief-stricken and desperately seeking the lost child. There is also a tale of a piper or jester who was imprisoned in the dungeons but escaped into a network of caves that lie beneath the castle never to be seen again. On stormy nights it is said that the sounds of his pipes can be heard coming from the caves on the beach.



**O.S. map location:**  
Dunskey Castle NX003533



[strength.retraced.blindfold](https://strength.retraced.blindfold)

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## Strongman's Cave

The cliffs north of Ardwell Bay have a number of caves where people resided as recently as 100 years ago. One of the smallest caves is Sheeps' Rink Co', a niche in the rocks where in the late 1800s William Purves took up residence. A former clown and strongman he retired to his seaside home where he undertook odd jobs and sold picture postcards of himself. He had many visitors during the summer season and kept a record of their names.



**O.S. map location:** Sheeps' Rink Co' NX071459 near Black Cave



holds.bookshelf.juror



# Face of the Devil

Throughout the Rhins of Galloway remnants of old-world customs linger from a time when people believed in superstitions to help explain their surroundings. Cliff arches were often thought to be un-natural and therefore they must be the work of the devil. This 'Devil's Bridge', north of Port Logan, names an arch that springs out of a high cliff and plunges into the sea. At certain angles is it said the face of the devil can be seen within the arch.

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**O.S. map location:**  
Devil's Bridge NX076417



[lists.frightens.poem](https://lists.frightens.poem)





# Fairy Stone

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It is not known why a granite boulder perched on top of a cliff south of Port Logan is known as the Compass Stone, however it is said to be a gathering place for fairies on their midnight gambols. There is a dark side to many tales involving fairies, and it may be that this is the same stone that a beautiful fairy girl was repeatedly observed at in 1798. Joyfully singing and dancing her appearance predicted the capture and execution of fugitives fleeing the Irish rebellion.



**O.S. map location:** Compass stone  
NX091401 near Cairnywellan Head



[operation.crimson.iron](http://operation.crimson.iron)

# Witches Spell

Below the foghorn on the Mull of Galloway is Carrickcarlin Point - carrick means rock and carlin is a Scots term for a witch or old woman, a name probably inspired by the tale of witches who conjured up nine tides in one place. Several versions of the story exist but they all agree that nine witches cast a spell to trap passengers on a boat as it passed the Mull of Galloway. They were then prevented from lifting the spell and so the rough seas remained for all time.

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**O.S. map location:**

Carrickcarlin Point NX157302



[replays.screen.solving](https://replays.screen.solving)







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# Heather Ale

When the Scots defeated the Picts on the Rhins all but two, a father and son, were slain. The victors sought the recipe of the celebrated Heather Ale but the father said he could only tell them if they killed his son first. When the deed was done the father laughed because he knew the sacred recipe would never be revealed. He threw himself from the cliffs, the secret dying with him on the rocks below.



**O.S. map location:**  
Mull of Galloway NX154304



titles.enhanced.intent



# Healing Rockpools

Lying below the clifftop are the healing pools associated with St Medan's Cave and Chapel which have long been a place of pilgrimage. Although it is unclear who St Medan was, local legend portrays her as an Irish princess who converted to Christianity. The chapel is in ruins but the three circular rock pools known as Chapel Wells can still be seen. The healing properties were believed to be most effective on the first Sunday in May. Access to this cave is difficult and should only be attempted with local guidance.

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**O.S. map location:**  
Chapel Wells NX143315



[extra.munch.pace](https://extra.munch.pace)





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## Fairy Curse

The Dunnan, a small promontory fort at Portlennie, is the setting for a traditional tale. It tells us the mound is the home of fairies where a local farmer met an old woman with an ailing child. He refused to fetch her healing water from the nearby Chapel Wells so she warned him never to sit on the roof of her home again or he would be cursed. After he sat on the mound once more a series of mishaps followed ending with his death.



**O.S. map location:**  
Portlennie NX141322



[forge.quieter.spindles](https://forge.quieter.spindles)

# Fairy Food Offerings

The Cave of Grennan lies close to the coast road between Drummore and Ardwell. It was believed to be the haunt of faries and people passing would leave food offerings to ensure a safe journey. The cave is clearly shown on old maps on the landward side of the road and was rumoured to be very long, extensive enough for people to get lost underground and perhaps reach the other side of the Rhins. Recent rock falls appear to have blocked the passage.

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**O.S. map location:**  
Grennan Cave NX126398



avid.jars.flamingo





**83 mile**  
circular walking route  
on Scotland's south  
west coast

Find out more about  
the Rhins of Galloway  
Coast Path by visiting:  
[dgitrails.org](http://dgitrails.org)



### Route Sections

- 1 Stranraer - Corsewall
- 2 Corsewall - Portpatrick
- 3 Portpatrick - Port Logan
- 4 Port Logan - Mull of Galloway
- 5 Mull of Galloway - Ardwell
- 6 Ardwell - Stranraer