

Archaeology on the Rhins Coast Path

# North 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.


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

**South-west Rhins Guide** 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.



# Castle of St. John

## Site 1

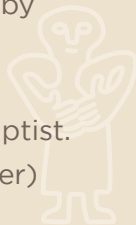
This tower house was built in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century by the Adairs of Kilhilt, one of the most powerful families in the area at the time. It was their family home as well as a base from which they managed their territory, which covered a significant chunk of the Rhins. A plaque above the front door shows the names Adair and Kennedy, perhaps marking the marriage in the 1590s of Elizabeth Adair to John Kennedy.

In the late 1670s the tower was used as a military garrison, and in early 19<sup>th</sup> century it was converted into a jail. A report in 1843 describes the inspectors' shock at the conditions, which were poor even by Victorian period standards. The tower is now a museum; more info at [dgculture.co.uk](http://dgculture.co.uk)

Place-name: perhaps named for St John the Baptist.



NX 0609 6082 (Charlotte Street, Stranraer)  
what3words: perch.shelter.prosper



## Site 2

# The Kilmorie Stone



Kirkcolm Churchyard is home to the Kilmorie Stone, a medieval carved stone dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century AD. The two sides of the cross are quite distinct in style and technique, and they were likely carved by different people, at different times.

The front of the stone depicts Christ on the cross. Below is a figure with two large birds to its left, and tongs and a pair of blocks to the right. The lower figure might represent a Roman soldier, or perhaps a character from Norse mythology: Odin with his ravens, or Sigurd at the forge learning the language of the birds. Alternatively, the scene may relate to Columba's vision of the blacksmith Columb Coilrigin's ascent to heaven, or the stone could be a memorial for a blacksmith.



NX 0271 6870

what3words: kinder.tender.thickens

# The Kilmorie Stone

## Site 2 (cont.)

The other side of the Kilmorie Stone is more skilfully carved. It shows a cross on a stepped base, probably an altar. A hollow at the centre of the cross may have held a metalwork fitting, a relic, or possibly some combination of the two. Below the cross are two horns, probably drinking horns. The horns frame an animal or animals that form an interlaced knot, and there is more animal interlace below the horns as well.

You can find much more information about the stone, and a 3D model, at [dgtrails.org](https://www.dgtrails.org).

Place-name: Gaelic *cill* + personal name *Moire*, 'St Mary's Chapel'.



NX 0271 6870

what3words: kinder.tender.thickens



## Site 3

# Caspin Promontory Fort & Kelping Site

Image © Fearann Alba



During the Iron Age, a promontory fort was built at Caspin. A deep gully was dug across the neck of the promontory and a drystone wall was built along the lip of the gully, creating an impressive defended settlement.

Later, the gully was used in harvesting kelp in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A trackway led down to the base of the gully, where you can still see revetments for a platform onto which kelp was hoisted. Burnt kelp was used as fertiliser, and for making glass and soap. It also has bleaching properties, and may have been harvested here for use in the local linen industry.

Place-name: origins unclear, perhaps Gaelic *cas* 'foot' + *peighinn* 'pennyland', making 'foot of the pennyland'. A pennyland is an old land measurement, perhaps of Norse origin.



NX 0052 7325

what3words: purple.dignify.writings



# Dunskirloch Promontory Fort

## Site 4

The community that built this promontory fort made the most of the topography, exploiting a deep natural fissure in the bedrock which formed a ready-made ditch. A single wall on the inside of the fissure created an impressive barrier. The Rhins coastline is scattered with forts like this, built around 2000 years ago in the Iron Age.

Inside the fort is a mound with a dip in the top; the function and date of the mound are not known.

Place-name: Gaelic *dùn* 'fort, hill' + *sgeir* 'rock in the sea, cliff, sharp rock', with suffix *-lach*, forming *\*sgeirlach* 'sharp rocky [place]'.



NW 9823 7273 (parking near Corsewall Lighthouse)  
what3words: stewing.pulse.fractions



## Site 5

# Dunsour/North Cairn Radar Station

Image © Fearann Alba



A Chain Home radar station was established at North Cairn Farm during WWII. Visible remains close to the path include the transmitter (NW 97244 70730) and receiver blocks (NW 97081 70486), the Identify Friend or Foe (IFF) building (NW 97250 70549), and the engine room (NW 97211 70567).

Chain Home was Britain's first radar system, in operation by September 1938. It was used to detect aircraft, allowing Britain to deploy its air defences against heavy German attacks during the early years of the war.

Place-name: Gaelic *dùn* 'fort' or 'hill' + *samhradh*, perhaps 'summer'. Another possibility might be *dùn saor*, 'fort of [the] craftsmen'.



NGR: above  
what3words: pirate.reflected.goodbye



# Dally Bay Limekiln

## Site 6

A jumble of stones almost conceals the remains of an 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century lime kiln. Limestone is a sedimentary rock formed mostly of calcium carbonate. Burnt lime alters the natural pH of the soil and has been used by farmers to optimise soil conditions for many centuries.

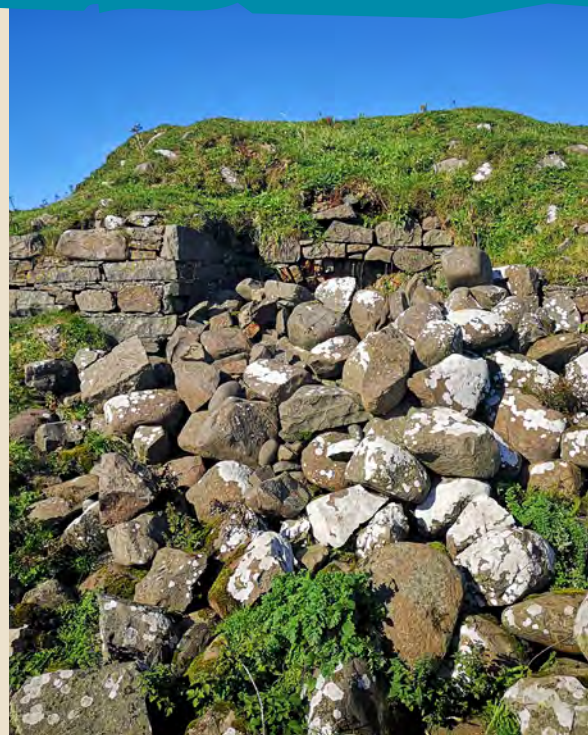
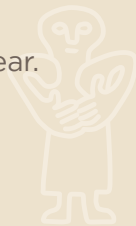
There are over 1000 lime kilns recorded in Scotland, and they were once a common sight in the Rhins. Limestone was tipped in at the top, in alternating layers with burning coke (coal). The resulting quicklime was scooped out from the bottom, accessed via the arched entrance visible at Dally Bay today.

Place-name: origins of the name Dally are unclear.



NW 9666 6900

what3words: local.spearhead.sides



# Site 7

# Castle Ban Motte

Image © Fearann Alba



This steep-sided artificial mound was once the site of a medieval castle. A ditch and bank crosses the neck of the promontory. The bank may have been topped by a tall fence, or palisade. The castle sat on top of the mound, or motte, and was probably built of wood.

The first mottes in Scotland were built in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century. They are the predecessors of the large stone castles we see today.

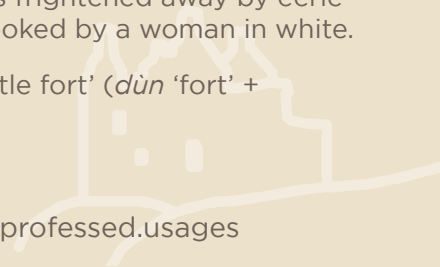
Legend has it that the site is protected by ghosts or fairies. At least three treasure-hunters were scared off: the first chopped his own foot off with his spade as he began to dig; the second was frightened away by eerie noises; and the third was spooked by a woman in white.

Place-name: Gaelic *dùnan* 'little fort' (*dùn* 'fort' + diminutive suffix *-an*).



NW 9659 6781

what3words: fancied.professed.usages



# Galdenoch Castle

## Site 8

This 16<sup>th</sup> century tower-house was built for Gilbert Agnew of Lochnaw. It is L-shaped in plan, originally three storeys high with a vaulted ground floor. The south-west corner has a corbelled turret. A turnpike stair gave access to the upper storeys.

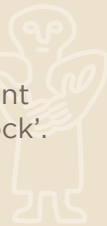
Legend has it that the ghost of a man murdered by a son of the house haunts Galdenoch Castle. The spirit is said to have set fire to farm buildings and plunged an old lady into the nearby burn. Several clergymen tried to rid the tower of the ghost, but it was eventually exorcised by the Rev. Mr Marshall, Minister of Kirkcolm from AD 1700, and infamous for his persecution of witches.

Place-name: probably Gaelic *gallan* + suffix *-ach*, hence *gallanach* 'place of *gallan*'. *Gallan* is the plant 'coltsfoot', 'a young tree, sapling', or 'an erratic rock'.



NW 9735 6324

what3words: hiked.talking.marker





Some two thousand years before Salt Pans Bay was home to a saltworks, an Iron Age fort (left) was built on a rocky promontory extending into the sea at the north-west of the bay.

The builders made the most of the topography, using natural rocky outcrops to enhance the size and appearance of the substantial drystone walls across the neck of the promontory.

A saltworks was established here in around AD 1640. Uchtred Agnew of Galdenoch made a contract with Alexander Osborne, giving him an acre of land and permission to cut peats for fuel. The works were still in use in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Visible remains on the ground (shown overleaf) comprise the low remains of a kiln and a handful of buildings, likely the saltern, or pan-house, and the salter's accommodation.



NW 9639 6157 (fort)

what3words: vies.barbarian.bidder

# Salt Pans Bay

# Site 9 (cont.)

Salt has been made in Scotland since at least the medieval period. Seawater (brine) was heated in rectangular tanks known as pans. The water evaporated so that only salt was left behind.

Traces of a post-medieval farmstead are also visible in the form of drystone enclosures and rig and furrow (ridges and troughs caused by ploughing).

The layering of archaeology here highlights how desirable a spot Salt Pans Bay was.

Place-name: refers to the salt pans used to extract salt from seawater.



NW 9645 6160 (saltworks)  
what3words: universal.tank.skies



## Site 10

# Meikle Larbrax Promontory Fort



High above the raised beach at Larbrax Bay is a large Iron Age fort, built some 2000 years ago. Multiple ramparts and ditches form a formidable barrier across the neck of the promontory. The fort may also have had a rampart running around the perimeter to enclose the site fully and keep wandering children and animals safe from falls.

There are no visible features within the fort. Traces of rig and furrow show that the promontory was farmed in the medieval period, likely removing any obvious evidence of the buildings within.

Place-name: Meikle is Scots 'large, great'. Larbrax was originally Largbrek, Gaelic *learg breac* 'the speckled slope'. Site also known as Kemp's Walk, from Scots *wark* 'work', often in the sense of 'fortification, large building'.



NW 9754 5983

what3words: meanwhile.beaten.brownish



# Cable House, Port Kale

Site 11

This unusual structure, double hexagonal in plan, is a cable house. It was built in 1852 to house the apparatus required for testing the first telegraph cable between Scotland and Ireland. A handful of companies raced to be first to make the connection, in fierce competition with each other (and sometimes in secret), but the British and Irish Magnetic Telegraph Company was successful in 1853.

The cable laid down at that time was used until 1983, when it was superseded.

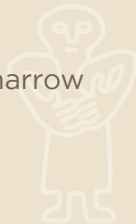
The cable house stands today as a monument to a great feat of engineering and a revolutionary innovation in communications.

Place-name: Gaelic *port caol* 'narrow harbour, narrow haven'.



NW 9912 5526

what3words: wrong.perfumes.spurring



## Site 12

# Glen Cottage Standing Stone



This unassuming block of granite tells a story of ancient beliefs. Set back a little from the coast, close to a steep-sided promontory known as the Islay Knoll, it was placed here during the Neolithic or Bronze Age.

We don't have a clear understanding of what standing stones meant to the communities who erected them, nor do we know whether they meant the same thing to everyone. What we can say is that people invested significant energy and effort in creating stone circles and standing stones; these monuments must have been important to prehistoric belief systems.

Place-name: glen has its origins in Gaelic *gleann* 'valley, glen', but was borrowed into both Scots and Scottish Standard English, with the same meaning.



NW 9927 5533

what3words: profile.upsetting.dragons



# 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](http://dgtrails.org).



Supported by Kilgallioch Community Fund with funding from ScottishPower Renewables' Kilgallioch Windfarm.

