



PORTENCROSS CASTLE TO HUNTERSTON: A WALK



The Portencross to Hunterston walk combines history with scenery and wildlife, particularly plants, butterflies and birds.



Remember to take your camera and binoculars! Please respect the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, stay on paths and keep dogs under control.

See www.outdooraccess-scotland.com.



Look at the stations marked on the maps. You can follow the trail as far as you wish.

The adventurous can walk a full loop, past Hunterston House and Hunterston Castle to join the A78, and then back along Portencross Road to the castle car park.





Station 1. Portencross Castle

You can pick up leaflets about the history and architecture of the castle when it is open, or download them from our website.



If you look carefully at the east wing (car park side), you can spot where the castle has been altered. Look round the castle too at the details of the windows and how these vary.

The small natural harbour beside the castle was perfect for hauling up and launching birlinns, the Hebridean galley ships of the period (see picture beside the maps). This harbour was replaced by the 'new harbour' which you can see as you look upriver.

Over the years, Portencross has survived through fishing, farming and recreation. In more recent times it has been the haunt of artists and photographers.

Look up eastwards (behind the castle) towards Auldhill. This was the site of a very early settlement and eventually a fort up until the time Portencross Castle was built in the mid 1300s.



The display at the castle and a leaflet describe how the castle was built in phases from a hall house to the L-shaped tower house you see today.

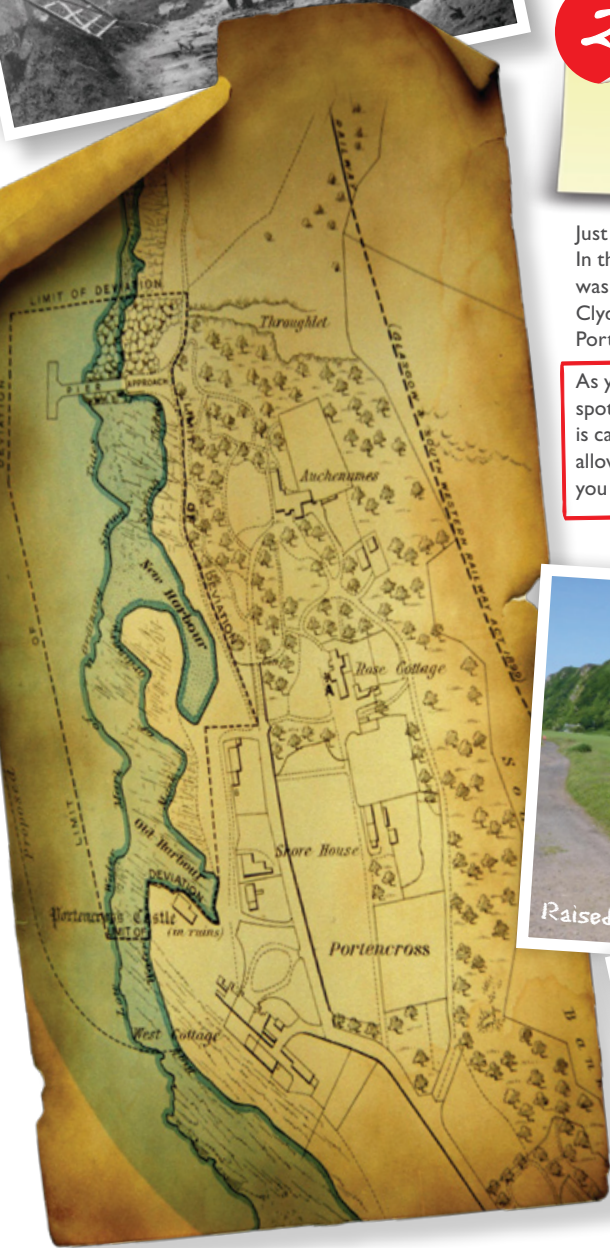
The painstaking conservation work has taken more than a year to complete. See the back page for more details --->



2. Station 2. The Throughlet

Just before the The Throughlet is a concrete pier. In the early 1900s, a railway line was planned, but it was never built. The pier was used for a period by Clyde steamers and the Waverley has also visited Portencross.

As you pass through The Throughlet see if you can spot any signs that the harder rock here (the ridge is called a dyke) was blasted with dynamite to allow the track through. Once through, you can see the flat field which is a 'raised beach'.



Raised Beach



Oyster Catcher



Bloody Cranesbill - the Flower of Portencross



White Campion

Ladybirds



Bees



Flag Iris



ew



Gorse



You should be able to spot many birds at the raised beach and further on, including noisy oystercatchers, preening cormorants, hovering hawks and gliding fulmars launching themselves from the rock face. You might also see ducks in the water and different species of gull.

You can also spot many species of wild flowers, lichen, insects and even deer. The 'flower of Portencross' is the Bloody Cranesbill. If you are fortunate, you may be able to see porpoises or even a basking shark in the water.

Deer



Peacock Butterfly



Wild Garlic



Harebell



Spear Thistle



Lesser Blackbacked Gull



Hogweed



3.

Station 3. Northbanks

As you walk towards Northbank Cottage on the track, look to see Little Cumbrae (known locally as Wee Cumbrae). The island was once a hunting forest for the kings of Scotland. You can still see the original lighthouse. You may also be able to see the castle and houses on the shore. Further north, you can also see the town of Millport on (big) Cumbrae.



Wee Cumbrae

Out to sea is a Spanish wreck. It may be that it was a ship from the Armada (1588). About 150 years after it sank, several cannon were rescued from the ship. To this day, despite extensive corrosion, the villagers of Portencross still have one of the cannon.



Galleon

Northbanks Cottage is beautifully situated beneath the sandstone cliffs of Ardneil Bank. It was the site of a 'crime of passion' in 1913 when Mary Gunn was shot and killed here. She lived in the cottage with her sister and brother-in-law who were injured in the shooting. The case remains unsolved to this day.

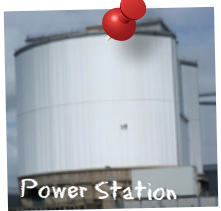
4. Station 4. Little Brigurd

When you pass through the gate onto the tarmac road, a hundred metres or so beyond that on your right is Hawking Craig. In 1826, workmen found the Hunterston Brooch at the foot of the cliffs. The brooch is made of gold and silver and is sumptuously decorated. It is a truly special object, and much bigger and more decorative than contemporary brooches. It was probably made at one of the royal sites of Dalriada, such as Dunadd in Argyll. Two hundred years after it was made, it was inscribed with Viking runes. It is one of the iconic objects of Scotland's early historic and Viking periods. Walking further on until you are near the visitors' entrance to Hunterston Power Station, on the shore to your left is Little Brigurd Point. This is the site of a very early, and



Hawking Craig

← Hunterston Brooch



Power Station



Old Harbour

extensive harbour, probably Roman in origin. You can also see the cooling outlet from the power station as the water rushes into a raised dome out in the estuary. A wetlands area has been created to your right where you may see the herons feeding patiently.

5.

Station 5.

Hunterston House

The Hunter Family were probably Norman in origin and part of the De Morville family which came to Scotland in the reign of David I. They were keepers of the Royal Forests.

Hunterston House was built in 1799 to replace the castle as a dwelling house. The house is three storeys high and has many attic windows. At the corner, a tower looks out to sea and projects a further storey beyond the roofline. Part of the building has been covered in pink harling. This contrasts sharply with the rest of the rambling Victorian mansion.



When BNFL took over the mansion, the Hunter family moved back to Hunterston Castle which had been used as servants' quarters when Hunterston House was first built.



6.

Station 6.

Hunterston Castle

Hunterston Castle dates from the 1200s (the Pele tower) but was substantially added to in the 1500s by the 14th Laird who constructed the great hall.

The castle is made from local red sandstone like Portencross Castle. Hunterston Castle too has a barrel-vaulted roof supporting the huge weight of stone above.

Hunterston Castle has an interesting feature in its roof beams. You can still see the marks made by the carpenters at the time it was built. The roof beams clearly show medieval carpentry techniques such as mortice and tenon joints secured with pegs.



Friends of Portencross Castle

This leaflet was produced by Friends of Portencross Castle (FOPC).

FOPC is a recognised Scottish Charity (No. SC028181) dedicated to conserving the castle and providing access to the building. In 2007 FOPC was awarded grant support from The Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic Scotland and the Architectural Heritage Fund. With additional support from local charities, North Ayrshire Council and many individuals, FOPC was able to raise just over £1 million pounds for the costs of the project.

Grant support does not include maintenance. As a result FOPC has to raise costs for staff, maintenance, education materials, website and overheads. We will remain open with the help of donations and by having events and functions at the castle.

Please donate if you can. You can become a Guardian of Portencross Castle. Find out more from this leaflet or at our website www.portencrosscastle.org.uk.

About Portencross Castle

Portencross has been inhabited for thousands of years. An archaeological dig found evidence of an Iron Age settlement on Auldhill, just behind Portencross Castle.

Portencross Castle was constructed in three phases starting in 1360. It was the home of a branch of the Boyds. The lands around Portencross were given to the Boyds of Kilmarnock by King Robert I as reward for their help at the Battle of Bannockburn. A number of Royal Charters were signed at the castle and it had close links with King Robert II during that period. For a while during the 1600s, it was occupied by local fishermen. The roof was destroyed in a gale in the late 1739. By the 20th century, the Adams of Auchenames owned the castle. It became a scheduled ancient monument in 1955.

For Teachers

The short walk from Portencross Castle to Hunterston House and Hunterston Castle provides an excellent opportunity for young people to explore particular aspects of the area. You can explore many curriculum areas and also show how these relate to one another. At the castle, or on our website, you can find leaflets on birdlife, geology, construction activities at the castle, history and architecture amongst others. You can also see examples of the art and poetry produced by children and parents at a local primary school.

The leaflets contain links to the experiences and outcomes of the curriculum.

