

Tales from Kirkcudbright Bay

Where Every
Place Tells a Story

Solway Firth

Partnership





Kirkcudbright Bay

This guide is an introduction to some of the stories inspired by people and places in Kirkcudbright Bay. It is the tidal estuary of the River Dee and 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.

Explore the seashore and discover the dramatic seascape but remember to take care on the coast.

A walking guide, *Kirkcudbright Bay Walks*, is also available and describes three routes to access the magical countryside 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.

Ask people who know the area where the good places are to visit or get a detailed Ordnance Survey map and look up tide timetables to plan your own adventure.



Bay Tales

Places are made from stories and by retelling the story of a place its meaning is brought to life. All names begin by describing a place to other people, as a way of helping us find our way in the world.

With one or two words they tell a story that provides clues about the history of our coast and reveal what people considered noteworthy.

A name can help to identify places of archaeological importance or landmarks that are the setting for folk tales or works of fiction. Some names have existed for hundreds of years, while others are a modern phenomenon, but they all tell a story.





Take Care



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



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



The coast 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 has one of the largest tidal ranges in the world. Remember to check the tide times to avoid becoming stranded on the vast sand-flats or in tidal bays.



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



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

Richardson's Rock

A local story tells us of the day when Janet Richardson went to the shore to collect mussels at low tide. Preoccupied in her task, she did not notice the incoming tide and was stranded on a rocky island. Surrounded by the sea, she pulled up her skirt and plunged into the water. Luckily, her clothes acted as a buoyancy aid and finding herself floating in the sea, she was washed ashore by strong currents to Milton Sands, near the beach at The Doon. From that day onwards the rocks became known as Richardson's Rocks.



O.S. map location:
Rocks in the sound of Little Ross
NX655432

1





2

Madras Cottages

The barque Madras arrived at Whitehaven in January 1884 with a cargo of timber from America. While waiting for a high tide at the harbour the winds became gale force and the captain decided to run for shelter in Kirkcudbright Bay. On entering the bay she struck the sand bar and began to break up. Three fishermen put to sea in a small boat and rescued the crew. The cottages next to Harbour Cottage Art Gallery were rebuilt by Lord Selkirk after the incident and are believed to have been rented to the brave fishermen at a nominal rent. For many years they were known as Madras Cottages.



O.S. map location:
Cottages in Kirkcudbright
NX681510

Senwick Church Yard

Senwick, derived from the Norse meaning Sand Bay, was a parish until it was united with the parish of Borgue in 1670. The ruins of the old parish church are situated within a graveyard and the burial vault of the 'Blairs of Dundrod' still stands. The manse ruins are located between the graveyard and the shore. The headstone of Robert Watson marks the grave of a drowned lighthouse keeper from Little Ross. He had gone to Kirkcudbright to buy stores and commissioned a local fisherman and his son to take him and the supplies back to Little Ross. It is not known what went wrong but the next day the bodies were discovered washed up on the shore.

3



O.S. map location:
Senwick Church remains
NX655460





4

Frenchman's Rock

A local tradition tells us that Senwick Church was once plundered by French pirates. They stole the silver plate from the altar but they paid with their lives as they made their escape. The heavens, as if watching over this act, stirred up the winds and waves and the ship was wrecked on the rocks. Frenchman's Rock is named after this memorable event but the silver was never recovered. It is also said that one foggy night the rock was bombarded by local soldiers in the mistaken belief that it was John Paul Jones's ship on a raid to Kirkcudbright.



O.S. map location:

Frenchman's Rock
NX660463

Carlin's Cove

A local tale tells us that the tiny cave in Senwick Bay known as Carlin's Cove was a hiding place for a Covenanter called Dixon during the religious persecutions of the killing times. The cave is very small and it seems unlikely that it was a good hiding place, however recent research has revealed that there is some truth in the story. Archive records of a court case in 1684 identifies Mareon McKie from nearby Over Senwick (now Upper Senwick) as being accused of helping a fugitive named John Richardson, his surname being shortened to Dixon in the collective memory.



O.S. map location:
Senwick Bay
NX657471

5





6

Devil's Thrashing Floor

Also known as the Devil's Threshing Floor it is recorded in the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey name book as being a rock at high tide but is generally believed to identify an area of mud flats where a 'dog leg' line of boulders reaches out towards the river channel. An 1802 plan of fish traps identifies the line of boulders as a stone fish yair (trap) and was probably in use for many hundreds of years. Perhaps the name is a reference to the fish thrashing in the trap when it is revealed at low tide. The map shows another ancient fish trap at Goat Well Bay where there is also line of boulders.



O.S. map location:
Devil's Thrashing Floor
NX659473

Monrieth

Low tide reveals the ribs of the wrecked schooner named the Monreith. She was built at Port William in 1880 and owned by Alex Hill in Ireland. In November 1900 she was on passage from Newcastle, County Down to Silloth with a cargo of 100 tonnes of granite kerbstones and put into Kirkcudbright Bay to shelter from a storm. She struck the sand bar and was driven into Goat Well Bay on the Milton Sands. The crew escaped unharmed before the lifeboat reached them and they returned to Ireland with assistance from the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society. Every year a little more of the Monreith disappears. TAKE CARE the sand and mud can be treacherous next to the wreck!



O.S. map location:
Nun Mill Bay / The Doon
NX658485

7





Clinking Haven

8

This small bay appears to be named after the clinking sound made by the stones on the shore when they are disturbed by waves. Beyond the bay is the Shoulder O' Craig where remains of a volcanic vent has been identified by geologists. The vent was probably created by gases escaping from a volcano before it was filled by lava and shattered rocks. Evidence of the vent is provided by an outcrop of basalt containing shards of stone, a sharp contrast with the surrounding sedimentary beds of mudstones and sandstones known as greywacke.



O.S. map location:
Shoulder O' Craig
NX662490

Paul Jones's Point

John Paul Jones's Point refers to the memory of a remarkable event in the history of St Mary's Isle. Jones was born in Galloway and became a sailor on merchant ships before joining the fledgling United States Navy during the American revolution. In 1778 as commander of the Ranger he made an unsuccessful assault on Whitehaven so he sailed to Kirkcudbright Bay. A plan to capture the Earl of Selkirk and hold him to ransom failed because the Earl was away. The crew took the family silver instead although it appears Jones later returned it to the family with a letter of apology. He went on to have a valiant role in a battle off Flamborough Head in Yorkshire and is remembered today as an American Naval Hero.



O.S. map location:
Paul Jones's Point
NX673484

9





10

Lady's Bay

Kirkcudbright lifeboat station and slipway was constructed in 1892 to replace the first lifeboat station located in the town. Despite the longer journey for the crew to reach the lifeboat, the new location ensured access to water even at low tide and greatly reduced the time taken to get the boat out onto the open sea. Beyond the lifeboat station a crushed stone path continues through the deciduous woodland passing Bathing House Bay. There is no sign of a bathing house today and the site is known locally as Lady's Bay, perhaps because in the past it was a favourite place for the Lady of the estate to bathe. A sandy beach is revealed at low tide and the bay remains an ideal place for a dip.



O.S. map location:
Bathing House Bay
NX673461

Witchwife Haven

Halftide Rock is located at the mouth of the estuary and as the name implies is only exposed at half-tide. It provides a guide to the depth of water to sailors who need to approach Kirkcudbright when the tide is high. The sheltered bay of Witchwife Haven is no longer marked on maps and the reason it was named after a witch is not clear. Coastal stacks are sometimes called Witch Rocks and the stack next to the cliff within the bay may be the inspiration for the unusual name. The bay remains a haven for small boats waiting for the tides to change or sheltering from an unfavourable wind.



O.S. map location:
Halftide Rock
NX672450

11





Flint Bay

12

Although this name does not appear on maps it is known by sailors as Flint Bay because of the large number of flints found only in this location. An explanation for this geological oddity (the nearest flints are found in Northern Ireland) lies in the tale of a wreck in January 1816. The sloop, *Ellen and Agnes*, laden with beef, hides and flint was lost here and the three crew members were drowned. All that remains of the wreck is a bay scattered with the cargo of flints and a place name that has become part of our oral tradition.



O.S. map location:
Halftide Rock
NX673451

Ravens Nest

The raven is the largest of the crow family with a distinct shape and a heavy bill. Tumbling in the updrafts of a sea cliff the 'gronking' call of a raven is one of the most evocative sounds of our rugged shoreline. Ravens often return to the same spot each spring and bring new nest material so that the nests become large, untidy piles of sticks that remain as a landmark long after the nest has been abandoned. However, the name may not refer to a nest at all but instead be derived from the word ness meaning a promontory.

13



O.S. map location:
Halftide Rock
NX673450





14

Gauger's Loup

This place name refers to a fictitious customs man who was often called a Gauger because he tested and measured the contents of casks, and Loup the Scots for leap. In later editions of 'Guy Mannering' by Sir Walter Scott he notes; *strangers who visit this place, the scenery which is highly romantic, are also shown, under the name of Gauger's Loup, a tremendous precipice, being the same, it is asserted, from which Kennedy is precipitated.* In 'Guy Mannering' smugglers kidnap a boy after he witnesses them murdering a customs officer named Kennedy by pushing him off a cliff. It seems enterprising locals identified this real place with one that features in the popular story.



O.S. map location:
Gauger's Loup
NX673448

Sapphire

The Ordnance Survey surveyor recording place names in the mid 1800s appears to have realised that this name has probably arisen from a misunderstanding. Although he identifies two people who confirm that this stretch of coastline was called Sapphire he also noted that the New Statistical Account states; *upon the rocks towards the sea is found an abundance of samphire*. Rock samphire is a succulent plant at its northern most range and only grows in Scotland where it can make the most of the sun warmed south facing cliffs. The pungent leaves of this plant were once collected to make into a pickle.

15



O.S. map location:
Gauger's Loup
NX674447





16

Keaw Cove

This cave is christened Keaw which is a local Scots name for jackdaw, however the Ordnance Survey surveyor recording place names in the 1840s noted that the recently published New Statistical Account stated that at this location; *rears a lofty head facing the sea, forming a frightful precipice,....frequented by the red-legged jackdaw.* The red-legged jackdaw is now more commonly known as a chough and are a species which no longer lives on the Solway coast. Chough can be found on similar coastal habitats in the Isle of Man and perhaps one day they will return to this rugged coast.



O.S. map location:

Gauger's Loup

NX673447

Dirk Hatteraick's Cove

Torr's Cave was also known as Torr's Cove. There is no doubt that in times past the indented shoreline was attractive to smugglers and was the haunt of the infamous Jack Yawkins. It is thought that the character of smuggler Dirk Hatteraick in Sir Walter Scott's novel *Guy Mannering* was based on Yawkins and for a while Torr's Cove was renamed Dirk Hatteraick's Cove. Caves are probably not the best hiding place for smuggled goods but archaeological excavations have shown that the cave was used as a shelter for thousands of years and intriguing carvings have been removed for safe keeping in the Stewartry Museum.

17



O.S. map location:
Torr's Cave
NX676445





KIRKCUDBRIGHT

2



Castle

Barhill Woods

Nun Mill Bay
or The Doon



8

Mill Hall

7

6

Devil's
Threshing
Floor

5

Senwick Bay

4

Frenchman's
Rock

3

Old Senwick
Churchyard

Meikle Ross

1

Little Ross

Kirkcudbright Bay

Torr's
Point

11/12/13
14/15/16

17

10 Lifeboat
Station

Torr's
Farm

Dundrennan
MOD Range

John Paul
Jones's Point

9

Point of
the Isle

St Mary's
Isle

Manxman's
Lake

Mutehill

