

## 5.2 Ballintoy Church to Portballintrae

56

57

61

Distance **12.0 miles** 19.3 km

Terrain mainly gravel and grass cliff top paths with sections of sandy beaches with some rocky scrambling and a few short road links

Grade varied gradients with undulations & flights of steps

Food and drink Ballintoy Harbour, Portballintrae

Side-trips Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre, Bushmills Distillery

Summary a fine sequence of coastal scenery packed with many points of interest, culminating with the Grand Causeway

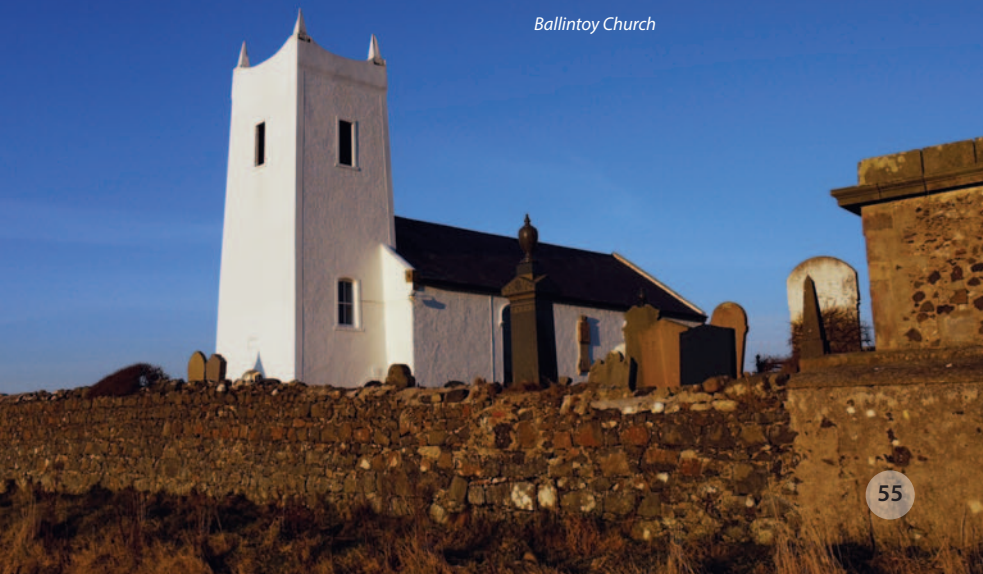


Before committing yourself to White Park Bay, check tide times: see page 70. The headland at the eastern end of the bay is often impassable around high tide. Also the rocky scramble at the western end can become very challenging – but there is an escape route. To bypass the beach route, turn left up Harbour Road, turn right along the main road for 4 km and turn right down Portbraddan Road to resume the Way: see map on page 57.

- Otherwise, turn right down Harbour Road past Ballintoy Church, and follow it as it zigzags steeply down to the sea. After 850 m, it arrives at Ballintoy harbour, a famous location to GoT fans.
- Notice a lime kiln on the left, and information boards about the white limestone, sea birds and GoT filming: see page 25. Follow the shoreline path, well-defined at first, through gates/stiles across the raised beach. Enjoy fine views of sea stacks, arches and the wonderful Elephant Rock: see page 22.
- Just beyond Elephant Rock comes the headland shown on page 12. If the sea state and your agility make it safe to proceed, go around it with care: the rocks can be very slippery, but any difficulties are brief. Just around the headland lie the glorious sands of White Park Bay.
- Cross the 2.5 km (1½ miles) of superb beach to pass under Portbraddan cliffs. At the beach end, there's a stiff scramble over the rocks – if it's safe to proceed. (If not, backtrack to escape by the uphill path before the cliffs.)



Ballintoy Church





*Across the bay to Geeragh Point*

- Go up towards the houses and turn right in front of them. (The road bypass route rejoins the Way here.)
- After Portbraddan Cottage (NT) take a narrow path at the base of the cliffs. After 300 m, it rises to pass through the hole in an old sea arch at Gid Point.
- Descend the slippery rock steps with care and cross a rocky beach by two ladder stiles. Head inland on an intricate section across farmland, carefully following signs around field edges, over stiles and across footbridges.





*Ruins of Dunseverick Castle*

- At about mile 12.1, the trail forks right to descend to the shoreline, crossing a field to reach Dunseverick car park with toilets and slipway.
- Follow the road uphill for 150 m and turn right to descend into a field by stone steps. The trod path then turns left (no waymarker) and rises before halting abruptly at a cliff drop with fine views across the bay.
- Turn left to pass around the bay, crossing first a small footbridge, then a larger one over a river which cascades down the rock-face into the sea.
- Continue along a grassy path around Geeragh Point, after which you start to see Dunseverick Castle on the promontory to your right. Turn right just before the road and enter a car park; the castle information board (over the wall) was in 2020 too faded to read.
- The trail follows a grassy clifftop path fenced off from the fields to the left. Gaps in the dense vegetation allow intermittent fine coastal views in both directions.







*Horse Shoe Harbour with Nurse and Child at upper right*

- The path continues for about 850 m to reach a small headland with views over the promontory of Benadanir. Just beyond, at Port Moon, the remains of an old salmon fishery cottage sit at the base of the cliffs.
- The trail ascends over a further 850 m to reach Contham Head (mile 14.4). Later, at mile 14.7 it crosses a stile to arrive at Bengore Head, the highest point of this section with cliffs over 100 m high. Look behind you for views all the way east to Fair Head.
- The trail undulates further over the next 1 km and enters the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Benbane Head (mile 15.3): see the map on pages 18-19.
- The trail swings left and as you round the corner, you glimpse distant mountains ahead: these are in Donegal, in the Republic. Further on, look back down over Horse Shoe Harbour, a rocky outcrop with two basalt columns affectionately known as the Nurse and Child: see photo above.

- The trail makes steep undulations over Plaiskin Head and Benanouran Head (mile 15-7).
- From the headland, look over to the reef off Lacada Point. An information board explains about the sinking of La Girona: see panel.
- Just beyond the next headland are the Chimney Tops, leading to the bay backed by the Amphitheatre. At its far end, visit the viewpoint to your right, Roveran Valley Head: you'll probably see tiny-looking people on the paths far below.
- At mile 16-8, turn right to descend the steep flight of steps on the Shepherd's Path. (The path ahead also leads to the Visitor's Centre, but runs inland among vegetation and misses good views of the finest of the Causeway's features.)
- Descend all 162 steps and walk down a path to reach a T-junction within 250 m. It's worth making a 400-m detour to the right. This path passes under the Giant's Organ (see page 21) and gives views of the Amphitheatre with Chimney Tops and Giant's Harp around the corner.

*North-west from the Amphitheatre*



#### **La Girona**

*The Spanish Armada set out to overthrow Queen Elizabeth I in 1588.*

*Retreating after their initial attack, the fleet of ships sailed around the top of Scotland and Ireland to get back to Spain. Along the northern and western coasts, the Armada encountered severe storms which destroyed over 20 vessels.*

*Already carrying 800 survivors from two other shipwrecks, the heavily laden La Girona crashed into the reef. Only five of the 1300 people on board survived. For several weeks dead bodies were washed up on the shores. Some of these are said to be buried in St. Cuthbert's Graveyard, across the road from Dunluce Castle.*





Sea Gull Isle, Port Noffer

- Return to the T-junction and keep straight on downhill to Port Noffer. After 350 m, a side-path on the right leads to the Giant's Boot: see below.
- A further 150 m of path leads to the focal point of the Grand Causeway on the right, flanked by Middle and Little Causeways to its left.
- The trail continues on around the bay of Port Ganny. The road begins to rise over the first 500 m through the Windy Gap. Once through the gap, the road continues a steady climb for a further 500 m to reach the Visitor's Centre: see panel.
- Walk west from the Visitor Centre up a stepped path that passes behind the Causeway Hotel and continues towards Runkerry Point at mile 18.5.



#### **Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre**

*The National Trust has cared for the Giant's Causeway since 1961.*

*Its role is to conserve the landscape and educate the public on the heritage.*

*In 1986 it became a UNESCO World Heritage Site and visitor numbers have increased ever since.*

*The current Visitor Centre cost over £18 million, opened in 2012 and combines striking architecture with energy saving and water conservation. It offers audio guides in 11 languages, café, shop and exhibition with a video of the Finn McCool legend.*

*After the 2020 pandemic, the centre reopened with visitor numbers controlled by timed slots pre-booked online at [nationaltrust.org.uk/giantscauseway](https://nationaltrust.org.uk/giantscauseway) tel: 02820 731 855.*

The Giant's Boot





Basalt columns





Bushmills – Giant's Causeway steam train

- If time permits, consider a side-trip on the steam train to Bushmills, to visit the world's oldest distillery: see panel.
- The Way passes along the clifftop with fine views of Great Stookan to your right. At the first headland a sign announces the end of the World Heritage site.
- At mile 18.2, look down over the dramatic inlet of Portcoon. After a flight of timber steps, pass a memorial to two pilots whose training flight in 1942 crashed nearby.
- Rounding the next headland, you pass the Victorian grand mansion of Runkerry House on your left (now luxury apartments). Go ahead past the slipway on the right to reach the ruins of Blackrock fishery station.



#### **Bushmills Distillery**



*Bushmills is the world's oldest licensed distillery. Its licence dates from 1608, although the distilling in this area goes back several centuries further. Irish emigrants helped to establish a market for Bushmills in the United States prior to Prohibition (1920-33). After the ban was lifted, large stockpiles of Bushmills Whiskey were ready for export, increasing its market share. A narrow-gauge line connects the Giant's Causeway to the village of Bushmills. A steam train makes several return journeys each day along the 3 km of restored railway line. Distillery visits take about 40 minutes; cost in 2020 was £8. For opening times and restrictions, see [www.bushmills.com](http://www.bushmills.com).*







*North-east toward Runkerry House*

- About mile 19, a small wooden bridge crosses Runkerry Burn at the start of Runkerry beach. The Way climbs a sand dune and continues uphill to meet the train line. (You could turn right if you prefer to walk across the beach, turning left at its far end for the bridge.)
- The Way turns right to follow the path beside the railway track for about 600 m, changing sides about halfway along.
- Bear right along a series of unsigned board-walks to pick up the riverside after about 200 m. After a further 350 m down the banks, the Way crosses the River Bush by an old bridge refurbished in 1995. (This is at mile 19.9 where the beach walk rejoins the Way.)
- The path continues along the river towards the sea and reaches a large car park after 450 m. Consider a short detour of 100 m up the hill on the left to see the Lissanduff Earthworks, thought to date back to the Iron Age.
- From the car park, follow Beach Road for 650 m around a sharp left bend to the centre of Portballintrae.

*North-east over Runkerry beach*

