

# Gradients, terrain and navigation



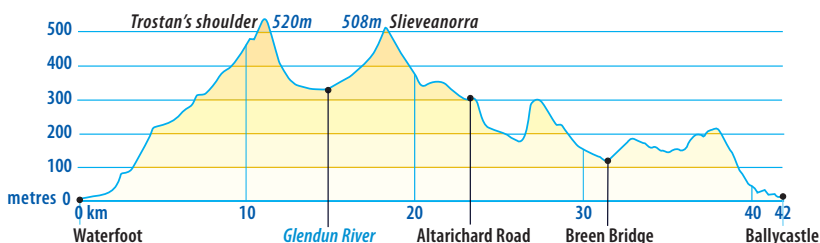
*Lurigethan Mountain (overlooking Cushendall)*

## Moyle Way

The Moyle Way goes through forestry and across open mountainside. It has several long ascents, two of which push above the 500 m (1640 ft) contour. By contrast, the route of the Causeway Coast Way (CCW) is largely dictated by the coastline and it is always low-lying, albeit in parts it undulates considerably.

Navigating the Moyle Way (MW) is also more challenging than the CCW. Weather will affect your pace: recent rainfall makes for boggy trails and slow progress. In the mountains, gradients will slow you down, as well as terrain. Fog and mist may also hamper your speed, demanding careful navigation on the open hillside. Expect to average up to 3-4 km/hr (2-2.5 mph) when walking the MW excluding stops.

At least one member of your party should be competent at navigating, and it may be prudent to carry GPS as backup: see page 71. Between Waterfoot and Ballycastle, the MW passes through very remote areas. Sections of the trail are poorly signposted and there are some discrepancies with OSNI maps, explained in Part 3. Remain vigilant, keep track of your position on the map and check each junction for signs.





*Scramble at western end of White Park Bay*

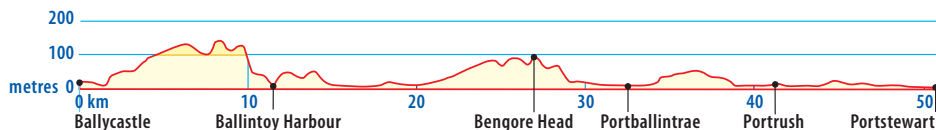
## Causeway Coast Way

Navigating the CCW is mostly more straightforward: keep the sea to your right. Signposts are fairly frequent but occasionally a disc, arrow or fingerpost is missing or overgrown. Follow our directions carefully and refer to our mapping whenever in doubt.

The CCW has mixed terrain, with beaches, clifftop paths and some road walking – extensive on day one between Ballycastle and Ballintoy. The route undulates and in places is punctuated by stiles and flights of steps. Overall, you can expect to maintain about 3-4 km/hr (2-2.5 mph) for most of it. You may go slowly over beaches, perhaps while enjoying a barefoot walk or paddle.

White Park Bay has slow going over the rocky scramble at its western end: see photo above. How challenging this is, and whether you can access the beach from the east, depends crucially on the state of the tide. Read carefully the warnings on page 12 and also on page 70.

High winds on clifftop paths may also slow you down. To estimate your day's walking time, allow for rest and refreshment stops, and also for the time you will want to spend visiting castles, watching wildlife and, above all, enjoying the features of the Giant's Causeway.



## What is the best time of year?

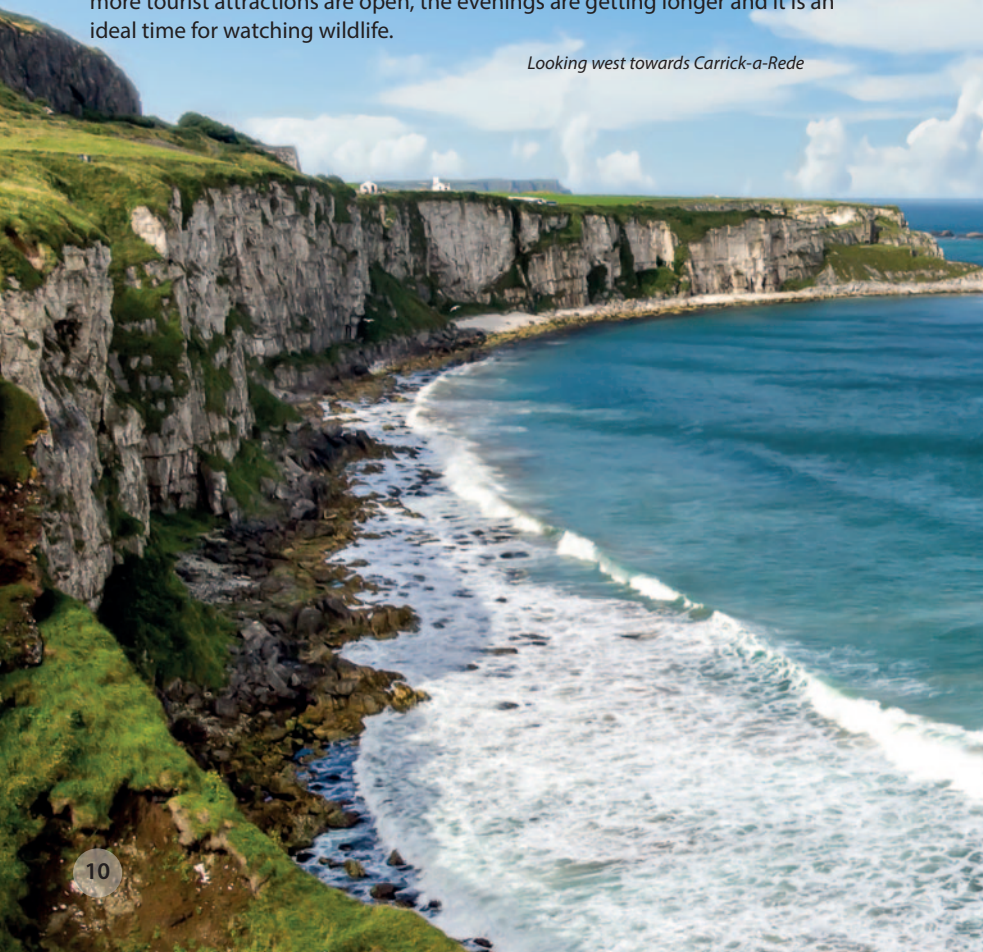
Although both trails are open year-round, the months from November through to March are far from ideal. In addition to poorer weather and boggy underfoot, the hours of daylight are much shorter, fewer buses run and accommodation may be hard to find. The Moyle Way in particular has poor drainage, making its terrain challenging in the wet.

Here are some factors that may affect your decision:

- There is more pressure on accommodation during July and August.
- Biting insects such as midges and horse-flies are most active during summer months, especially July and August. Forested areas on the Moyle Way are the worst afflicted.
- Around the equinoxes (21/22 March and 21/22 September), tides are extra high. This may require careful timing of your walk across White Park Bay: see page 9.
- The Orange Order's marching season peaks on the 12th of July. Although most parades pass without incident, they still affect traffic.
- Bird-watchers may want to visit Rathlin Island between May and July to observe the puffins.
- Some areas along the Moyle Way have shoots during the game season (August to January).

All in all, the ideal time of the year to visit Antrim is from April to June. In spring, more tourist attractions are open, the evenings are getting longer and it is an ideal time for watching wildlife.

*Looking west towards Carrick-a-Rede*





## Experience and preparation

The Causeway Coast Way requires little experience in the way of map-reading, it never ventures above 150 m/500 ft and it's full of points of interest – a good choice for your first long-distance walk. If you are new to such walking, you will enjoy the experience much more if you prepare for it and obtain the proper equipment. Start by getting advice on footwear and waterproofs, for example from our *Notes for novices*: see page 70.

Aim to build up your fitness and ability to navigate before starting out on the trail. Begin with day walks and build up to walking for 4-6 hours at a stretch. If you prefer sociable walking, consider joining a local walking club or go with somebody who has previous experience. If you intend walking independently of a luggage transfer service, practise carrying extra weight in your rucksack. Unless you are good at travelling light, you may find that such a service helps you to make the most of your holiday.



*Beach walking*





*Route to White Park Bay submerged at high tide*

## **Safety, weather and tides**

Heavy periods of rain can cause havoc to sections of the Moyle Way. The banks of the Glenariff River rest on a contained overflow area. If the water level is dangerously high, divert to the Glen Road to the east of the valley. Rain on higher ground can make the going treacherous, although waterproof boots and hiking poles will help. Breathable, windproof and waterproof clothing is essential to keep dry and avoid hypothermia. Your rucksack's contents may become soaked and useless unless protected with a waterproof cover or internal waterproof bags.

Windy conditions also pose risk to walkers, especially on the cliffs of the CCW and Rathlin Island. Beware of leaning into the wind on an unprotected cliff edge: if the wind suddenly drops you may lose balance. Always maintain a safe distance from the cliff edge.



On the CCW, both ends of White Park Bay may be impassable at high tide. The photo above shows the eastern end with the route line on submerged rocks at high tide. You might have to wait two hours for the sea level to drop enough to keep your feet dry. At the western end, the longer rock scramble (shown on page 9) may be difficult or impossible at tidal extremes, albeit there is an escape route. If the entire beach route is unsafe, the fallback runs along the main road, but that would demand a huge uphill backtrack if you have already descended to the beach. Make your decision before you reach Ballintoy Church: see pages 55-7. Be aware that the sea state, wind and tidal coefficient also affect the window of safety: see page 70 for explanation and for online tidal prediction.

For other reasons, try to avoid high tide for your visit to the Giant's Causeway: at low tide, more basalt columns are exposed and the site is less crowded.

Never rely on a mobile phone in an emergency. There are many 'black spots' at the base of cliffs and in the remote glens of Antrim. For greater safety in remote areas, walk in a group of three so that if an accident occurs, one person can seek help while the third person waits with the casualty.

## **The Mountain Code** *To report an accident dial 999 or 112 and ask for Mountain Rescue*

### **Before you go**

- Learn the use of map and compass
- Know the weather signs and local forecast: see page 70
- Plan within your abilities
- Know simple first aid and symptoms of exposure
- Know the mountain distress signals

### **When you go**

- Never go alone
- Leave a note of your route, and report on your return
- Take windproofs, waterproofs and survival bag
- Take suitable map and compass, torch and food
- Wear suitable boots
- Take special care in winter

## **Responsible walking and dogs**

Creating a long-distance trail is a delicate process that requires negotiated access to land. Although large chunks of land are owned by public bodies which are inclined to grant public access where possible, other areas are privately owned and demand that walkers respect the land owner's property and livelihood.

Land in the countryside is the working environment for others. From time to time, operations such as tree felling may mean that diversions are in place. Always follow the instructions on signs posted locally.

Walkers can bring dogs on these trails (except beaches in summer, see below) as long as they keep them on a lead and show proper consideration for wildlife. In areas such as nature reserves, ground-nesting birds must never be disturbed, especially in spring and summer. Dogs on leads can be left attached to tie posts at the Seabird Centre on Rathlin Island: they are not permitted in the centre or on the viewing platform.

Most of the private land across Antrim is used for sheep grazing. Be especially thoughtful before and during the lambing season (any time from January to May). Avoid stress to pregnant ewes and newborn lambs by keeping well away. Give cattle a wide berth, especially those with young.



*West from White Park Bay*





## Code of conduct for walkers

Commercial shooting takes place in the environs of Breen Wood on the Moyle Way between August and January. Keep your dog on a lead lest a sudden loud noise makes it bolt.

Always clean up after your dog if it fouls a footpath. Dogs are prohibited from some beaches from 1 May to 15 September, and from certain sections of beaches year-round, by bye-law of the Borough Council.

## Waymarking

Neither Causeway Coast nor Moyle Ways have separate logos, but they are subsets of the Ulster Way: follow its fern leaf logo, sometimes combined with a walker logo. Don't be led astray by signs for the Causeway Coastal Route: it's a 120-mile driving route that sometimes overlaps: see page 71.

## Code of conduct for walkers

- ✓ Guard against any risk of fire
- ✓ Leave all farm gates as you find them
- ✓ Keep to the waymarked trail
- ✓ Always use gates and stiles to avoid damage to fences, hedges and walls
- ✓ Take all your litter home
- ✓ Protect wildlife, plants and trees and safeguard water supplies
- ✓ Take heed of warning signs
- ✓ Immediately report any damage caused by your actions to the farmer or landowner
- ✓ Always keep children under close control and supervision, especially on country roads
- ✓ Please do not walk the Ways in large groups, which can be intrusive and noisy

Various signage used on the trails



### Accommodation

There is no shortage of accommodation along the Antrim coast, although advance booking is vital. The Moyle Way has facilities only at its ends and for most walkers, 26 miles needs to be split into two days to be possible, let alone enjoyable. (However, for the very fit walker in a hurry, we mention a 21-mile option on page 6.) To break this walk into two stages, arrange with a taxi



North Street, Ballycastle

service or B&B owner to collect you from Altarichard Road. Rathlin Island has very limited options (even in season) and advance booking is essential.

There are several tour operators who can organise your itinerary and make arrangements: see page 71. Although a package will cost a bit more than doing it all yourself, your luggage will be transferred while you walk and there's backup should you run into difficulty.

Those looking for added luxury will find hotels mainly along the north coast of Antrim, in Ballycastle, Giant's Causeway, Portballintrae, Portrush and Portstewart. Bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) are found all along the coast on or near the trail. Many have rooms with private facilities, and most charge supplements for singles (with or without facilities).

Budget accommodation is plentiful: there are hostels in Ballycastle, Rathlin, Ballintoy, Bushmills, White Park Bay, Portrush and Portstewart. Camping barns are found in Glenariff and on Rathlin Island. Official campsites along either of the walks are sparse: Glenariff Forest Park (MW) and at Glenmore, outside Ballycastle (CCW). A few caravan parks cater also for hikers, and there is an informal area for camping on Rathlin Island at Church Bay.

**Table 3 Facilities along the Ways**

*The table shows facilities that existed in 2019. After the 2020 pandemic, some were reopening when we last checked, others were still closed and some may never reopen.*

	B&B / hotel	hostel / bunkhouse / barn	campsite	pub / café	foodshop / takeaway
<b>Cushendall</b>	✓		✓	✓	✓
<b>Waterfoot</b>	✓			✓	✓
<b>Glenariff Forest Park</b>		✓		✓	
<b>Ballycastle</b>	✓	✓		✓	✓
<b>Ballintoy</b>	✓	✓		✓	
<b>White Park Bay</b>	✓	✓		✓	
<b>Giant's Causeway</b>	✓			✓	✓
<b>Bushmills</b>	✓	✓		✓	✓
<b>Portballintrae</b>	✓			✓	✓
<b>White Rocks</b>	✓		✓	✓	
<b>Portrush</b>	✓			✓	✓
<b>Portstewart</b>	✓	✓		✓	✓