

4.2 Ballintoy to Portballintrae

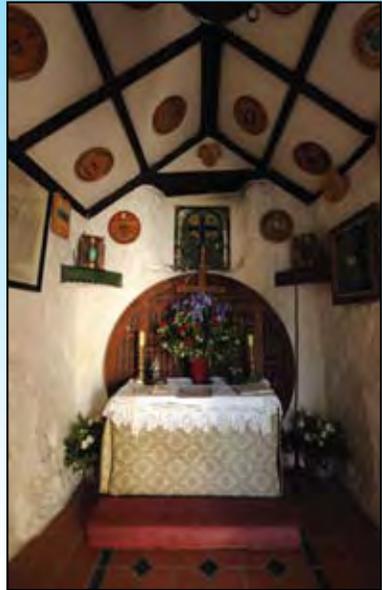
Map	panels 1 and 2 (inside back cover)
Distance	13 miles 21km
Terrain	mainly gravel and grass cliff top paths with sections of sandy beaches with some rocky crossing and a few short road links
Grade	mainly easy walking with some undulations & flights of steps
Food and drink	Ballintoy Harbour, the Giant's Causeway and Portballintrae
Side-trip	Bushmills Distillery
Summary	a fine sequence of coastal scenery packed with many points of interest, culminating with the Grand Causeway



- Before committing yourself to crossing White Park Bay, check tide times. Two short sections at each end of the bay may be impassable at extreme high tide. In that case, stick to the main road for 4 km west from Ballintoy and turn right down Portbraddan Road to resume the Way (top of page 48). To escape tide difficulties while on the beach, use the path leading uphill before the cliffs at Portbraddan.
- Otherwise, turn right down Harbour Road past Ballintoy Church, and follow it as it zigzags down to the sea. After 850 m, it arrives at the secluded harbour of Ballintoy.
- Opposite a lime kiln on the left is an information board about the landscape and sea birds. Cross the pebble beach leading to a raised beach with views of stranded sea stacks and the wonderful Elephant Rock: see page 22.
- Within 800 m of the harbour, the Way narrows down severely at the base of the cliffs. Around the corner lies White Park Bay. Take care while crossing a short stretch of large slippery rocks if the sea state makes it safe to do so.

Ballintoy Church

- White Park Bay beach is 2.5 km (1½ miles) long and leads to the cliffs of Portbraddan. At its end, scramble over a section of rocks to reach the row of houses. The Way turns right in front of them, passing the tiny blue-and-white St Gobban's Church: see panel.
- Further on past an old harbour, follow the 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. The raised beach on the far side has more isolated sea stacks.
- Climbing some steps up along a small cliff, the trail passes some exposed columns of basalt. After 800 m, it forks right to descend to the shoreline, crossing a field to reach Dunseverick car park with toilets.
- Follow the road uphill for 150 m and turn right to descend into a field. The trod path then turns left and rises slightly before coming to an abrupt halt at a cliff drop with fine views of the bay.
- Turn left to walk around the bay, then cross a footbridge over a river which cascades off the rock-face into the sea.
- Continue along a grassy path around Geeragh Point, within 800 m giving views of Dunseverick Castle on your right. Turn right just before the road (or cross the wall to read the information board) and enter a car park.
- The trail follows a grassy clifftop path fenced off from the fields to the left. Despite the vegetation, there are fine views along the coast in both directions.
- The path continues for about 850 m to reach a small headland with views over the large promontory of Benadanir. Just beyond, at Port Moon, the remains of an old salmon fishery cottage sit at the base of the cliffs.



Inside St. Gobban's Church



St Gobban's Church

St Gobban's Church is one of the more intimate tourist attractions on the Antrim coast. Tourist literature promotes it as Ireland's smallest church, but the owner, Reverend McConnell Auld, distances himself from this claim. The church operates as a non-denominational space for meditation.

Gobban Saer was one of the foremost architects in 7th century Ireland. This site is thought to contain one of many foundations that he laid in this area. The building had been used as a cow-shed in the 1960s before conversion into a private chapel.

Wooden plaques adorn the walls and ceiling inside the church, each commemorating a donation of £1000. In 2009, funds were given to clear up a rock fall close to the church which obstructed the Causeway Coast Way.



Ruins of Dunseverick Castle

- The trail ascends over a further 850 m to reach Contham Head. After another 800 m, it crosses a stile to arrive at the highest point of this section. The cliff at Bengore Head is about 100 m high.
- There is a slight drop in height over the next kilometre and the trail enters the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Hamilton's Seat, Benbane Head.
- Looking down into Port na Pleaskin is an easily recognisable Horse Shoe Harbour. At the top of this rocky outcrop are two basalt columns affectionately known as the Nurse and Child.

Horse Shoe Harbour with Nurse and Child at upper right



- The path rises to Plaiskin Head after 400 m. Views from here are of the Giant's Eye-glass – a sea arch that once resembled an eye-glass, but collapsed in 1949.
- It's another 800 m to the next headland, Benanouran Head. It looks over Port na Spaniagh to the reef off Lacada Point. An information board explains about the sinking of *La Girona*: see panel.
- The next headland is another 600 m away, with Chimney Tops just beyond. The next bay is the Amphitheatre, where many landmarks associated with the Causeway can be found.
- At the far end of the Amphitheatre there is a fine viewpoint to your right, at Roveran Valley Head, from which you'll see people on the Port Noffer paths below. After a further 600 m, 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 misses a close view of the finest parts of the Causeway's features.)
- Descend the 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.

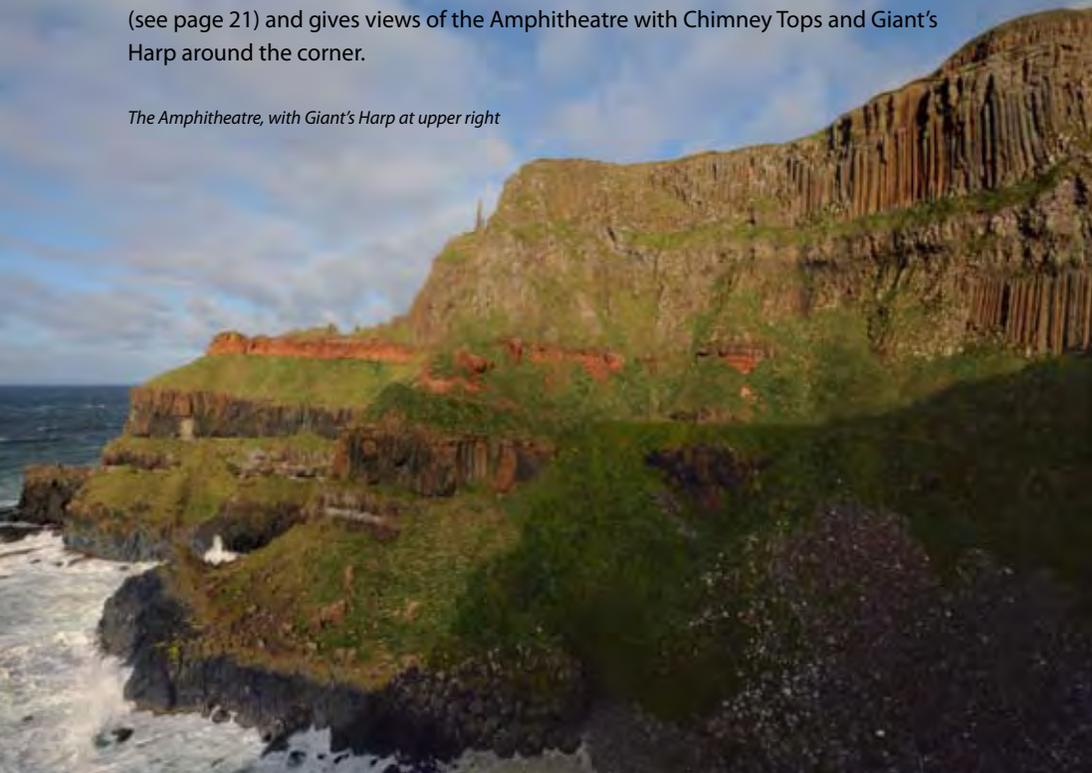


La Girona

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.

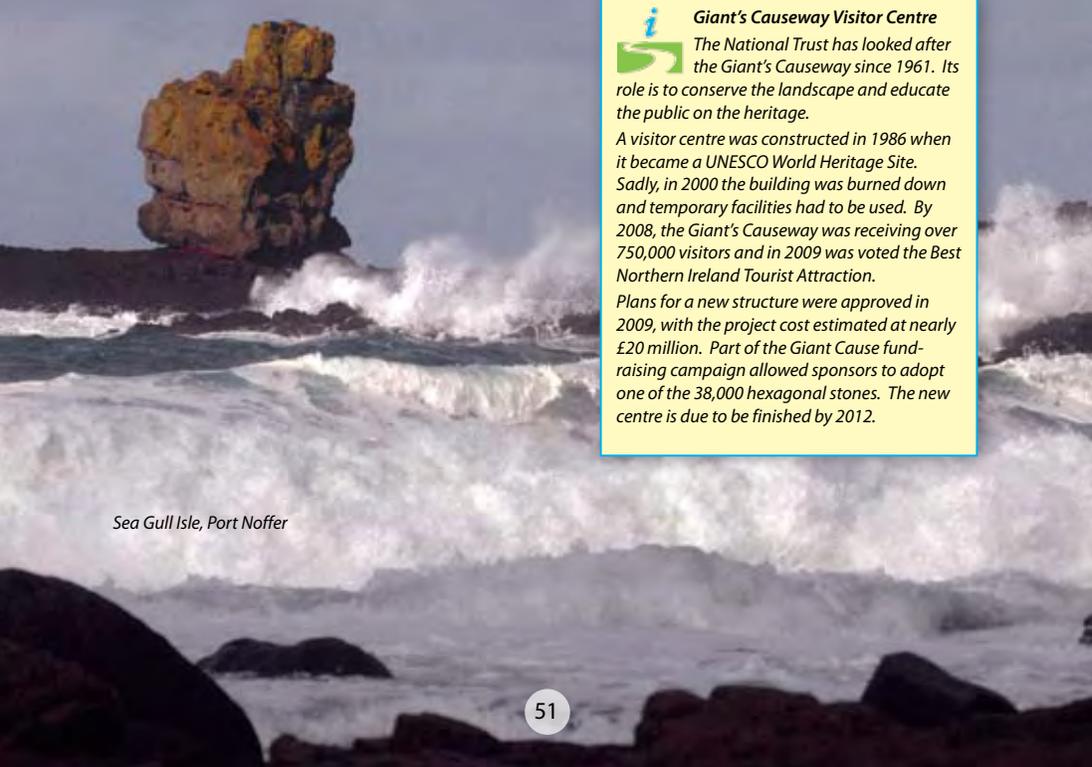
The Amphitheatre, with Giant's Harp at upper right



- Return to the T-junction and keep straight on downhill to Port Noffer. A right turn after 350 m leads to the Giant's Boot. 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.



The Grand Causeway



Sea Gull Isle, Port Noffer



Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre

The National Trust has looked after the Giant's Causeway since 1961. Its role is to conserve the landscape and educate the public on the heritage.

A visitor centre was constructed in 1986 when it became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Sadly, in 2000 the building was burned down and temporary facilities had to be used. By 2008, the Giant's Causeway was receiving over 750,000 visitors and in 2009 was voted the Best Northern Ireland Tourist Attraction.

Plans for a new structure were approved in 2009, with the project cost estimated at nearly £20 million. Part of the Giant Cause fundraising campaign allowed sponsors to adopt one of the 38,000 hexagonal stones. The new centre is due to be finished by 2012.

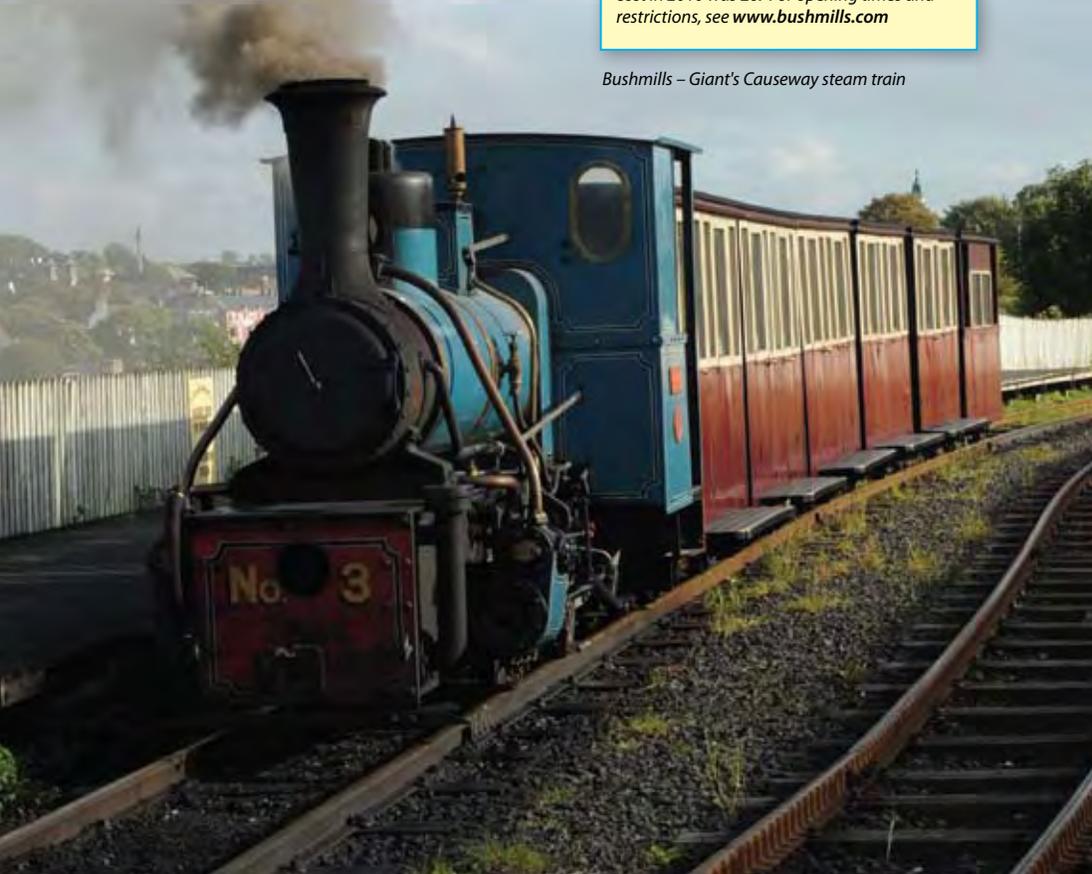
- Walk west from the Visitor Centre up a stepped path that passes the back of the Causeway Hotel and continues along Runkerry Cliff. (If time permits, you could consider a side-trip on the steam train to Bushmills, to visit the world's oldest distillery: see panel.)
- The Way passes along the clifftop overlooking Portnaboe. The tip of the first headland marks the end of the World Heritage site.
- 800 m after the Visitor's Centre is the inlet of Portcoon. After a brief dip in the trail you pass a memorial to two pilots whose training flight in 1942 crashed nearby.



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 2010 was £6. For opening times and restrictions, see www.bushmills.com

Bushmills – Giant's Causeway steam train





North-east toward Runkerry House

- Rounding Runkerry Point, you pass the fine 19th Century Runkerry House on your left. Descend to the shoreline to reach Blackrock fishery station after 1.1 km (0.7 mile).
- After 150 m, a small wooden bridge crosses Runkerry Burn at the start of Bushfoot Strand. 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 alongside the railway track for about 600 m, veering off to the right when the railway line bends left. Continue straight ahead among the sand dunes.
- After about 200 m across the dunes, you reach a board-walk along the riverside. A further 350 m down the river and the Way crosses the River Bush by an old bridge refurbished in 1995. (This is where the beach walk rejoins the Way.)
- The path continues along the river to towards the sea and reaches a large car park after 450 m. There is a short side-trip 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 Bushfoot Strand

