

1 Planning and preparation

The Dava Way (DW) is an inland route through remote countryside with no villages or refreshment stops and a high point of 320 m (over 1000 ft). The Moray Coast Trail is completely different: it stays on or very close to the coast, doesn't venture above 50 m (165 ft) and passes through several small towns and villages where public transport and other facilities are available.

The DW follows an old railway trackbed for almost its entire length, with just a few diversions around impassable sections and private dwellings. At each end the Way makes use of roadside footpaths and (near Grantown-on-Spey) a short stretch of quiet country road. Public transport serves the end points where there's ample accommodation. There are a few road access points along the way, but the only public transport is the school bus from Forres to Edinkillie.

The MCT combines many different surfaces, from quiet country roads to sandy beaches, as well as coastal and forest paths and tracks, roadside footpaths, old railway trackbeds and paths across rocky shores.

The DW is actually 23.4 miles (37.6 km) long, although distances on its trail signs show a rounded total. The MCT is 43.7 miles (70.3 km) long, although you will see its length quoted variously as anywhere from 41 to 50 miles. Combining the two makes for a week of splendid, varied walking ranging over some 67 miles (108 km).

Which direction?

The DW is described here northward from Grantown, to link with the MCT running eastward from Forres. Walking the DW from south to north involves less ascent overall, with Grantown at an altitude of about 200 m and Forres lying barely above sea level.

We then describe the MCT eastward: the approach to Cullen makes a grand coastal finale, whereas walking westward you would finish at Forres, having left the coast behind at Findhorn.



How long will it take?

With an early start and suitable transport arrangements, the DW can be walked in a single outing. For an energetic walker, it makes a satisfying, very long day. However, if the distance is too daunting, rest assured that you can break the walk into sections using the access points: see page 26. These show where a few small cars can be parked, especially the Dunphail Breathing Place. Dunphail also has the advantage of a nearby stop (Edinkillie) on the local school bus service.

You can make use of local taxi companies, though this would mean committing yourself to a pick-up time or depending on mobile phone reception in an area where a signal may not be reliable. For contact details, see page 60 or www.davaway.org.uk.

The MCT is more flexible with plenty of road access, although it has limited budget accommodation: see table 4 on page 10. Local bus services link the coastal towns and villages along the route with Forres and Elgin, and could help to overcome this problem.

Our MCT route description is divided into four sections, with two longish days. The Findhorn-Lossiemouth stretch (15.3 miles/24.6 km) can easily be broken in Burghead for a five-day itinerary. The other long day, Lossiemouth-Buckie (15.9 miles/25.6 km), can be split at Kingston or Garmouth, although accommodation in these two villages is very limited. Splitting both would make for a leisurely six-day walk with very modest daily distances.

Alternatively, for walkers with more stamina and time to complete 12 miles/20 km on their first walking day, three days may suffice, with overnights at Burghead and at Kingston or Garmouth. Table 1 shows options for four- and three-day itineraries.

The Moray Way combines the whole of the DW with two-thirds of the MCT and about half of the Speyside Way to form a circuit of 95 miles (153 km). The Speyside Way is an official long distance route that generally follows the course of the River Spey between Aviemore and its estuary at Spey Bay, a site of great scientific importance. Completing the Moray Way is an ambitious undertaking that could take six to nine days, longer with optional extensions: see pages 58-9 for more information.

Table 1 MCT distances and suggested overnight stops

	4-day itinerary		3-day itinerary	
	miles	km	miles	km
Forres				
Findhorn	5.5	8.8	12.2	19.6
Burghead	15.3	24.6		
Lossiemouth			16.7	26.8
Kingston	15.9	25.6		
Buckie			14.8	23.9
Cullen	7.0	11.3		
Total	43.7	70.3	43.7	70.3

Altitude, pace and waymarking

Depending on the season and recent weather, short sections of the DW may be boggy, but this is unlikely to affect your pace overall. Along the MCT, the main limiting factor can be the state of the tide and the firmness of the sand underfoot.

Another factor influencing your rate of travel will be the number of people in your group. Groups travel at the pace of their slowest member, or slightly less. Overall, expect to average 2 to 2½ mph (3-4 km/hr) unless you're very fit and keen to press on.

There's a high standard of waymarking along the DW, with signposts indicating direction and distance to various places. There are fingerposts with the DW logo or arrows where necessary, and at all junctions. In 2010, signage at the start and finish was being reorganised and improved.

The DW is essentially a medium-level route, rising to a high point of 320 m/1050 ft and remaining above 100 m until the approach to Forres: see page 26 for its profile.



Dava Way Association

The Association was founded by volunteers in 1997 following a Forres household survey in which development of the old Grantown-Forres railway line for cycling and walking was voted top proposal. During the next six years access was negotiated with the numerous landowners along the route. Then masses of broom, gorse and trees were cleared, some of the flooded cuttings made passable and a bridge was replaced. The Dava Way was officially opened in September 2005, and is maintained entirely by volunteers. For more information on this outstanding project, visit www.davaway.org.uk.





The MCT waymarking is more variable, although major improvements were under way late in 2010. Starting in Forres, you have a choice: the main Trail passes Benromach Distillery, or the alternative goes beside Sueno's Stone: see page 37. Beyond Findhorn, look for signposts in various styles, generally metal in towns and villages and wooden elsewhere. Some marker posts bear the MCT logo with fulmar, others have coloured bands or lettering. Some marker posts may be hidden by vegetation in summer.

What is the best time of the year?

Snow is likely to cover Dava Moor between November and March and some sections of the DW can be very wet during winter. Short days would make it impossible to complete the route in a single day at walking pace in daylight. All things considered, the ideal time would be between May and September.

The MCT can be walked at any time of year. There are long exposed sections without any form of shelter, where cold winds or hot sunshine can make walking uncomfortable. Wildflowers are at their best in late spring and early summer; birds are a source of interest year-round, with some rare species over-wintering here. Accommodation is more limited during winter, and hours of daylight restricted.