

## Foreword

Pilgrimage is an ancient tradition in all parts the world. In Tibet, for hundreds of years pilgrims in their thousands from at least four different religions have made their ritual circuit of Mount Kailash, Tibet's Sacred Mountain. Nearer home in Ireland, from time immemorial even before the arrival of Christianity, thousands of pilgrims have regularly climbed to the summit of what is now called Croagh Patrick, Ireland's Holy Mountain.

Happily, pilgrimage is now becoming a very modern practice as well. Scotland is blessed with ancient pilgrim routes which are being revived and new ones which are being created. All benefit from our unique combination of glorious scenery and sites of historic significance. The Forth to Farne Way does just that.

Along the Way, you can imagine the future Pope Pius II walking barefoot through the snow to St Mary's Well at Whitekirk, in thanksgiving for surviving a tempestuous sea journey. And, on reaching the end of the route at the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, you can think of St Cuthbert spending the last years of his life there.

With its combination of exercise for the body, mind and soul, modern pilgrimage in Scotland is surely set to grow and flourish. On the Forth to Farne Way the steep climbs and long days will offer a physical challenge. The fascinating geology and coastal heritage will stimulate the mind; and the soul will be cheered by the pilgrim lives and religious buildings that are documented throughout this inspirational, informative and practical guide.

*David Wilson*

*Lord Wilson of Tillyorn,*

*Patron of the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum*

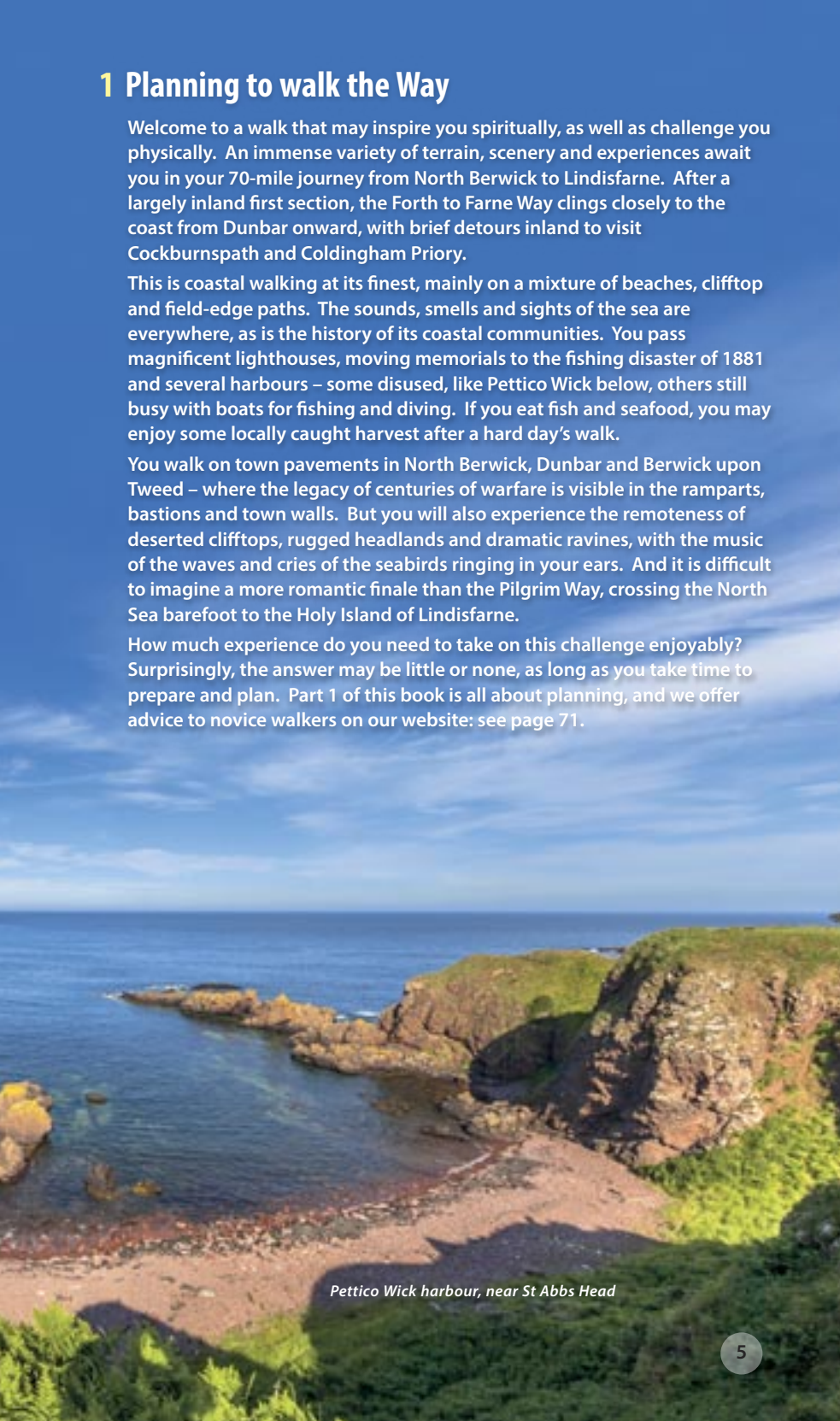
# 1 Planning to walk the Way

Welcome to a walk that may inspire you spiritually, as well as challenge you physically. An immense variety of terrain, scenery and experiences await you in your 70-mile journey from North Berwick to Lindisfarne. After a largely inland first section, the Forth to Farne Way clings closely to the coast from Dunbar onward, with brief detours inland to visit Cockburnspath and Coldingham Priory.

This is coastal walking at its finest, mainly on a mixture of beaches, clifftop and field-edge paths. The sounds, smells and sights of the sea are everywhere, as is the history of its coastal communities. You pass magnificent lighthouses, moving memorials to the fishing disaster of 1881 and several harbours – some disused, like Pettico Wick below, others still busy with boats for fishing and diving. If you eat fish and seafood, you may enjoy some locally caught harvest after a hard day's walk.

You walk on town pavements in North Berwick, Dunbar and Berwick upon Tweed – where the legacy of centuries of warfare is visible in the ramparts, bastions and town walls. But you will also experience the remoteness of deserted clifftops, rugged headlands and dramatic ravines, with the music of the waves and cries of the seabirds ringing in your ears. And it is difficult to imagine a more romantic finale than the Pilgrim Way, crossing the North Sea barefoot to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne.

How much experience do you need to take on this challenge enjoyably? Surprisingly, the answer may be little or none, as long as you take time to prepare and plan. Part 1 of this book is all about planning, and we offer advice to novice walkers on our website: see page 71.



*Pettico Wick harbour, near St Abbs Head*

## Best time of year and weather

Most people will opt to walk the Forth to Farne Way in late spring, summer or early autumn. Wildflowers are at their best in late spring and summer, and birds are more active and visible during early spring and late autumn.

Accommodation will also be more limited out of season, so the best times overall are generally from Easter to October.

Good Friday is an auspicious and popular day upon which to make the Pilgrim Way crossing to Lindisfarne, thanks to the Synod of Whitby: see the panel below. If you want to include the barefoot crossing in your itinerary (at any time of year), read page 8. You'll have to research tide times long before finalising your dates.

In theory, the Way could be walked at any time of year. It does not venture to high altitude and the major constraints on winter walking are short days, greater chance of wet, windy weather and sodden ground in the offroad sections. Unless you live at high latitude (about 56° N) you may not realise how short the daylight can become – fewer than eight hours in late December.



Finally, be aware that this stretch of coast is prone to sea fog (aka haar or sea fret), especially in summer months. It forms when warm moist air is chilled by the North Sea, causing condensation. Unless the land is warm and the sunshine strong, the fog may take a long time to burn off, especially if a sea breeze keeps sweeping more fog inland. It is not only damp and cooling, but also reduces visibility drastically; this can make navigation challenging. Banks of sea fog may begin and end abruptly.

*Above: Lindisfarne Castle from the west*

*Below: As seen through sea fog*

### **Tides at Easter**

*The Synod of Whitby was held in AD664: see page 16. It was convened to settle the correct date for Easter, agreed as the first Sunday after the first full moon after 20th March. A neat consequence of the Synod is that Easter pilgrims who arrive at Beal Sands on the morning of Good Friday will always find the tide is out, ready for their crossing of the Pilgrim Way.*



## Which direction?

We describe the route in the recommended southbound direction, with Lindisfarne as its culmination. It is of course possible to reverse this, and some walkers may have logistic reasons for ending their walk at North Berwick instead. Northbound walkers may experience the wind at their backs more often than southbound. However, we prefer to begin the route inland, then to follow increasingly rugged coastal scenery until the crossing to Lindisfarne and time on the island makes a fitting finale.

## How long will it take?

We present the route in five sections, but most walkers will want to spend six or more days, and many will split the route differently. The ideal itinerary depends on your interest in detours, on the time you need to rest or contemplate, and on your fitness, travel arrangements and accommodation availability. The route is intended as a long and enjoyable walk, not as a test of endurance or speed.

Some will wish to complete the route in a single expedition, whilst others may split it into two or more excursions, using the excellent train and bus services that serve North Berwick, Dunbar and Berwick upon Tweed.

Distances are shown in Table 1, in which you will see two sections that are over 16 miles/26 km – too long for a single day for many walkers even in the long days of summer. Splitting section 3-1 may require some support from a car or taxi driver in that public transport is scarce, and in 2020 there was only one B&B close to the route in East Linton. However it consists of easier, flatter walking than 3-3, and anyway the last few miles are around Dunbar to its parish church. If you stay near the western end of Dunbar you could postpone those miles to the start of your next day.

By contrast, section 3-3 has much more altitude gain and loss and also finer coastal scenery that you may wish to linger over. Happily, it also has intermediate places where accommodation is available, notably Coldingham (limited) and Eyemouth (with wider choice). So if you intend to split only one of the two longest sections, we suggest that you choose 3-4.

Another choice that will determine whether you need to add an extra night is how long you intend to spend on the tidal island of Lindisfarne, and which route you wish to take. Whilst it is just about possible to walk the 14 miles from Berwick to Lindisfarne Priory and, if tide and daylight permit, immediately turn around to return to the mainland on the same day, it would certainly be very challenging. Such a plan would demand extremely careful

**Table 1: the Way can be split in three ways**

|                | 5 sections |      | 6 sections |      | 7 sections |      |
|----------------|------------|------|------------|------|------------|------|
|                | mi         | km   | mi         | km   | mi         | km   |
| North Berwick  |            |      |            |      | 8.4        | 13.5 |
| East Linton    | 16.1       | 25.9 | 16.1       | 25.9 |            |      |
| Dunbar         |            |      |            |      | 7.7        | 12.4 |
| Cockburnspath* | 10.2       | 16.4 | 10.2       | 16.4 | 10.2       | 16.4 |
| St Abbs        | 13.6       | 21.9 | 13.6       | 21.9 | 13.6       | 21.9 |
| Eyemouth       | 16.1       | 25.9 |            |      | 5.8        | 9.3  |
| Berwick        |            |      | 10.3       | 16.6 | 10.3       | 16.6 |
| Lindisfarne    | 14.0       | 22.5 | 14.0       | 22.5 | 14.0       | 22.5 |
| <b>Total</b>   |            |      | <b>70</b>  |      | <b>113</b> |      |

\*Refer to page 10 for accommodation problem here

planning to fit two crossings within a tidal window, and would force you to use the car-busy causeway rather than the peaceful Pilgrim Way across the sands. And on many days the timing of tides and hours of daylight would make such a plan impossible.

In our view, having walked so far to such a special place, you should allow yourself time to enjoy it as a true island. If you want to arrive barefoot by the Pilgrim Way, you will need at least one overnight anyway. We recommend that you stay for two or more if possible. (Many B&Bs on Lindisfarne insist on two-night stays, especially at weekends.) Some may prefer an extended stay, whether to go into retreat, to watch the wildlife or to make repeated visits to Lindisfarne's many visitor attractions: see page 69.

## The Pilgrim Way to Lindisfarne

Timing is crucial: plan your crossing long in advance. The tidal window varies in length and often falls at an inconvenient or unsafe time of day: don't attempt the crossing in failing light or stormy weather. Judge for yourself, and if in doubt, don't.

Aim to set off on a falling tide, and allow 75-90 minutes to complete the crossing safely and calmly. If you arrive too early, you could detour (1.4 km each way) to the Barn at Beal for refreshments, but if you arrive too late, you'll have to use the causeway – or perhaps not cross at all.

The causeway 'safe' period varies in length from 5¼ hours to over 9 hours, but the safe window for the lower, more time-consuming Pilgrim Way is 3-4 hours shorter. At a time of extreme tides, therefore, you may have very little leeway about your start time. The goal is to complete your crossing by the time the tide turns, which is the midpoint of the advertised causeway safe crossing period.

Don't wear walking shoes: sticky mud and salt water will ruin them. We recommend bare feet with the option of crocs or waterproof sandals for short rough bits, including tarmac at the start and finish. If possible, carry a small towel to dry your feet and legs, and perhaps also binoculars if you are interested in seabirds and other wildlife.

Most of the terrain is firm sand, with mostly shallow sea water lying over firm sand; some short sections have rough vegetation and foot-sucking mud. Generally follow the line of wooden poles but don't be afraid to deviate slightly to avoid the occasional quagmire.

Take your time to savour this unique experience, every now and then making a 360° turn to drink in the sights and sounds of the North Sea.

*West from Lindisfarne across the Pilgrim Way*

