



The roofless tower at the end of a layered rock cliff, the sea calm below

Before you go

5.5 km (3.5 miles) there and back on one path; Venture North, the Caithness visitor site, allows 2½ to 3 hours. A short path to the broch, uneven in places, then rough, narrow cliff-top path, steep and exposed in places, with gates to climb and barbed wire. Boots.

Start at the Nybster Broch car park, a small one on the seaward side of the A99, 0.8 km south of Auckengill. No charge is published. D & E Coaches 77 and 80, Wick to John o' Groats, stop at Keiss and at Nybster Road End; check the day's times first.

No toilet is listed or mapped at the car park: the nearest is the council's Comfort Scheme toilet at the Sinclair Bay Hotel in Keiss. No shelter; in strong wind or rain, leave it for another day. Dogs on a lead near the edge and near farm animals, and out of fields with calves or lambs. On 21 December the sun sets at 3.19pm: from November to January, set off by 11am.

After the walk

For a short version, park in Keiss village and walk down to the harbour: the castle is about 15 minutes along the shore. Lunch, and dinner from 5.30pm, at the No 1 Bistro at Mackays Hotel in Wick (01955 602323).



The walk online, with its photographs and map:

hiddenscotland.com/walks/a-cliff-top-walk-from-nybster-broch-to-keiss-castle

It starts at the Nybster Broch car park, off the A99 0.8 km south of Auckengill, ND 370 635.

In an emergency, call 999 or 112 and ask for the police.

A CLIFF-TOP WALK TO

Keiss Castle



A HIDDEN SCOTLAND WALK

From Nybster Along the Cliffs

North of Sinclair's Bay the Caithness coast is a line of low cliffs cut by narrow inlets, with an Iron Age broch on one headland and a ruined castle on another. The cliff-top path between them is part of the John o' Groats Trail: rough, narrow and unfenced, it wants a dry, still day and a steady head.

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Beside the Nybster Broch car park stand the Nicolson Barometer, carved "Festina Lente", make haste slowly, and the Nicolson Cairn: memorials to Sir Francis Tress Barry, who dug the broch, carved by John Nicolson, his foreman. A short path, uneven in places, leads out to Nybster Broch on its cliff headland, built between 200 BC and AD 200. Its walls still stand several metres high among the outbuildings, some of which have fallen over the cliff.

From the broch the John o' Groats Trail runs south along the cliff tops. The path is rough and narrow, steep and exposed in places, with no fence at the edge, and it turns in and out round rocky inlets, the geos, with seabirds nesting on the ledges. The Trail warns

of a risk of death from falling off cliffs along this coast: keep well back, and keep children beside you. Its guide mentions gates to climb across and barbed wire, and Venture North notes the remains of wartime defences.

Keiss Castle is a Z-plan tower of four storeys on a rock stack, built about 1600 by George Sinclair, 5th Earl of Caithness, and ruinous by 1700; its north-east corner has gone with the cliff. It is fenced off and unsafe to enter, so look from the path: the view from the north, the one this walk gives, is the best there is. The white house behind it is Keiss House, built about 1755 and a private home. Come back the same way to Nybster.



There and back on the cliff path, part of the John o' Groats Trail: 5.5 km, or 3.5 miles, by Venture North.

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