

The Halladale from the air, pooling behind the dunes before the sea, Bighouse Lodge on the far bank

Before you go

A loop of roughly 1.2 km (three-quarters of a mile) by our map. Scotland Off the Beaten Track puts the sand five minutes from the car park; no source gives a time for the loop. Sandy paths through the dunes, down about 15 metres to the beach. The Captains call the beach unsuitable for visitors with limited mobility.

Start at the small car park at the end of the signed gravel track off the A836 in Melvich; no charge is published. The 274 bus between Thurso and Bettyhill stops at the Halladale Inn, Monday to Friday only, at least a kilometre away.

When the tide is in, keep to the dune and river-bank paths, and never wade the river. No toilets at the car park or on the beach: the village's have no disabled access or baby changing. Keep dogs on a short lead or close at heel from April to July. On 21 December the sun sets at 3.23pm here.

After the walk

The Store Café Bar, Bettyhill's old village store, is 20 minutes away by road; it opens at 9am daily and welcomes dogs.

The walk online, with its photographs and map:
hiddenscotland.com/walks/a-walk-to-melvich-beach-and-the-mouth-of-the-halladale

It starts at the Melvich Beach car park, at the end of the signed track off the A836 in the village, NC 887 647.

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

A WALK TO

Melvich Beach



A HIDDEN SCOTLAND WALK

Through the Dunes to the Mouth of the Halladale

The Halladale River reaches the north coast at Melvich, running out across one end of a wide golden beach. A short loop goes out through the marram dunes to the sand, east along the beach to the river mouth and back by the river bank, with Bighouse Lodge across the water. There's little to plan beyond the weather and the tide.

words // Hidden Scotland *photography* // Simon Hird

Start at the small car park at the end of the signed gravel track from the A836 in the village, over two cattle grids. A board here tells the story of the Big House area and the poet Rob Donn MacKay. Through the gate, the path runs north through the marram dunes, and Scotland Off the Beaten Track puts the sand five minutes away. Arctic terns nest in and around these dunes in spring and summer: keep to the path then, and keep dogs close.

The beach is a wide curve of golden sand, closed by the pier at Portskerra to the west and the cliffs below Rubha an Tuir to the east. Walk east along the sand towards the river. It's a surfers' beach, and Venture North warns of rip currents in the bay, so keep out of the surf. Seals put their heads up beyond the breakers.

At the beach's east end the Halladale reaches the sea, and here is the turn. Salmon sometimes jump at the mouth. Keep well clear of it, and never wade or cross the river or its channel on the sand. Come back up the west bank. Across the water stands Bighouse Lodge, a private sporting lodge and the old home of the chief of Clan Mackay. The footbridge by it is not a public way: stay on this side, and take the path west back to the car park.



Through the dunes, east along the sand to the mouth of the Halladale and back by the river bank: roughly 1.2 km, or three-quarters of a mile, by our map.

Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors

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