

The beach below the sea wall, looking back to the harbour front

Before you go

About 1.2 miles (2 km) there and back on one path; GPS Routes, a walking guide, gives 15 to 20 minutes each way. 126 steep steps up with no handrail, 18 more with handrails at the footbridge, then a narrow clifftop path with uneven ground. The council grades its Portpatrick to Port Logan section of the coast path strenuous.

Free parking on the harbour front, and an overspill car park along South Crescent. Bus 367 from Stranraer stops at Portpatrick Beach on South Crescent, near the foot of the steps; the times differ from day to day, so check the timetable.

Public toilets at the north end of the harbour; none on the path, and no shelter. Keep children close, and dogs under proper control. Go in daylight and in dry, still weather: on 21 December the sun rises at 8.42am and sets at 3.54pm.

After the walk

Lunch is back on the harbour front at the Harbour House Hotel, which serves food every day from 10am to 9pm; dogs are welcome in the bar and lounge. The Port Pantry, a few doors along, is usually open until 4pm; ring 01776 810655 to check.

The walk online, with its photographs and map:
hiddenscotland.com/walks/the-cliff-walk-to-dunskey-castle-from-portpatrick

It starts on Portpatrick's harbour front, at the head of South Crescent, NW 999 541.

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

A CLIFF WALK TO

Dunskey Castle



A HIDDEN SCOTLAND WALK

From Portpatrick's Harbour by the Steps and the Cliff Path

Dunskey Castle is a roofless tower house of the 1500s, the Adairs of Kinhilt's, on a promontory just south of Portpatrick, cut off from the land by a ditch in the rock. A short cliff path, about 1 km each way with a steep flight of steps, takes you there from the harbour, with Ireland across the water on a clear day, and back the same way.

words // Hidden Scotland *photography* // Hidden Scotland

Start on Portpatrick's harbour front. The Southern Upland Way begins here too, but it heads north: this walk goes south, on the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path. Walk along South Crescent, past the beach and the Portpatrick Beach bus stop, to where the road ends after about 300 metres, and a short gravel footway leads to the steps.

The steps climb steeply to the cliff top: OpenStreetMap counts 126 of them, with no handrail. At the top the view opens out across the sea to Ireland on a clear day. A wooden footbridge then crosses the cutting of the old Portpatrick and Wigtownshire Joint Railway, closed in 1965, with 13 steps down and 5 up, all with handrails, and the path runs on along a ridge between the sea and the cutting. Seabirds nest in spring on the rocky inlet below the footbridge, a Portpatrick guest house wrote in 2016.

From there a narrow clifftop path with uneven ground, the council says, runs south with the castle in sight ahead. Dunskey was a ruin by 1684, a tall, roofless shell with walls a metre and a half thick, guarded on its one landward side by a rock-cut ditch 15 metres wide, on a rock the estate puts about a hundred feet above the sea. The owner restricts access: the council says there is no access to the castle, but fine views of it from the cliffs to the south. Come back the same way, down the steps to the harbour.



There and back from Portpatrick's harbour on the Rhins of Galloway Coast Path: about 1.2 miles, or 2 km, in all.

Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors