

The Great British

# Walk

National Trust



## A secret walk at: Dunstanburgh

Mark Rowe, our walking pro, has discovered this secret walk for you to explore. Now you can follow in his footsteps...

He fell in love with walking in the wilds of Hertfordshire, while growing up in the suburbs of north London.

Today, Mark has worked regularly for the Trust's Great British Walk and The Independent on Sunday. He is also a contributing editor to BBC Countryfile Magazine. He is however, still learning how to fold an OS map in a force eight gale.

### A bit of background

Dunstanburgh Castle is a romantically ruined affair, its crenulated battlements and half-collapsed towers teetering high on a rocky, volcanic outcrop of basalt and sandstone. First established in the 14th century, and once twice the size it is today, the castle was key to the battles between England and the Scots, and saw heavy fighting during the Wars of the Roses. Its history, though, goes back further and the site was strategically important right back in the Iron Age.

### THE SECRET



Dunstanburgh may be a landmark castle on the Northumbrian coast, but few people walk around the back to see the spectacular view of the remains, its hidden cliffs and clues to Northumberland's volcanic past.

The majority of visitors to Dunstanburgh approach from the south, starting at Craster, but the trick here is to veer off the beaten track to discover its spectacular volcanic rocks. To the east of the castle the field edge suddenly slips away into St Margaret's cove, while to the north vertical columns of whinstone plummet perhaps 60m.



# The walk

## Dunstanburgh Castle



We set off along the classic approach, from Craster harbour, heading through tilting cattle-grazed fields that slide gently down to the North Sea. Our route quickly takes us up and around the castle.

## Embleton Bay

When it comes to the great outdoors, I'm a paid-up member



of the north-east appreciation society, and the scenery along the coast is one of the major reasons for this: looking south, the castle's turrets now resemble a broken, battle-dented crown. To the north is the magnificent crescent of Embleton Bay; at west is the humped, brooding outline of the Cheviot; gaze north to the Farne Islands; closer by, capping off Embleton Bay is Fill's Reef, a natural breakwater that echoes the shape of the Cobb at Lyme Regis. By our feet are the smaller, ground-up pieces of volcanic rock, known locally as "Dunstanburgh marbles".

## Giant's Causeway lookalike

The shoreline rocks appear to be embryonic hexagonal columns that resemble the Giant's Causeway. And that's with good reason.

*"They were formed by the same process, but the rocks here cooled more quickly, so didn't form into the hexagonal shapes of the Giant's Causeway."*

– Kevin Redgrave, National Trust Warden

## The Ship Inn



We continue northwards, passing the aptly-named and shapely saddle rock, a popular perching spot for seabirds, to reach the Ship Inn, based at the National Trust owned village of Low Newton By the Sea.

Our return route cuts behind the pub to the wonderful Newton Pools. There are hides to linger in here, and you have a good chance of seeing herons. Two pairs of barn owls like to hunt in the fields, and late afternoon and dusk is an excellent time to spot them.

## THE SECRET Volcanic remains



We edge around a golf course and walk in the shadow of the castle. To our right are further examples of the volcanic origins of this area, the heughs, (a local word for a rocky escarpment, pronounced 'hoofs'). Perpendicular whinstone columns stick out like broken teeth from these mounds, which are carpeted with bright yellow gorse.

We return to Craster harbour. There's a small shoreline here which is magnificent for bird watching in autumn.

*"At high tide when the seaweed, bugs and flies all get pushed up, it's a real feeding frenzy for the birds."*

– Jane Lancaster, National Trust Warden

Closing the last gate behind us, Jane echoes her initial thoughts about how a walk to Dunstanburgh is like stepping back in time.

*"Most people who come here, breath a sigh of relief that they have left the clutter of the 21st century behind."*

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