

Rugged island walk – 1.5 miles

Rathlin Island, Northern Ireland

This rugged, untamed island, which lies off Antrim's Causeway Coast plays host to a fantastic array of wildlife, including rare and vulnerable species such as the famous Puffin and the Albatross' cousin, the Fulmar. Take in the historical Crocknanagh settlement, once a busy working farm and marvel over the wonderful views of the western isles and the coast of Scotland from the cliff tops.

Start: The Coastguard Hut **Map:** OSNI Discoverer 05 **Grid ref:** D145523

Getting here...

Ferry: Ferries depart daily from Ballycastle across the Sea of Moyle; for further details visit www.rathlinballycastleferry.com. From the ferry port there are footpaths leading to the Coastguard Hut.

Facilities: WCs and accessible WCs at the RSPB sea bird reserve (not NT). For more information visit www.rspb.org.uk

Contact us: 028 9751 0721

Things to look out for...

The Coastguard Hut

The hut that you see today was built in 1941 to replace the wooden structure that was erected in 1933. During World War II it performed an important role overlooking the North Channel for signs of German invaders. Today it looks over a busy shipping channel and its sheltered position provides a great place for watching the resident sea birds or to eat your lunch!

Wildlife

There is a vast amount of wildlife on Rathlin Island and the area around Ballyconagan is made up of several different habitats, each of which attract a variety of insects and wildlife. On your walk you will pass through bogs and fens, dry western heath, species-rich grassland and shallow acid pools; keep an eye out for Irish hare, damsel and dragon flies and birds, such as Buzzards, Skylarks, Meadow Pipits, Reed Buntings and Linnets. Looking out over the cliffs near the Coastguard Hut you may see seals playing in the water and basking on the rocks. Further west, the RSPB reserve is a haven for sea birds, where you can spot Puffins, Razorbills, Fulmars and Guillemots, as well as the occasional porpoise if you're lucky!



The remains of the Crocknanagh settlement, pictured left, give you an insight into the island's farming history. Look out for faint cultivation ridges and spade marks in the wall-enclosed fields.



The island is home to a plethora of wildlife, including the popular Grey Seal. The Grey Seal is Britain's largest carnivorous mammal, feeding on a variety of fish and their life-span is between 26 to 38 years.

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You will find fantastic cliff-top views on this walk; this spectacular panorama (left) can be seen from Altacorry Bay in Ballyconagan and looks towards East Lighthouse. From point 3 on the map there are views over the western isles and the coast of Scotland.

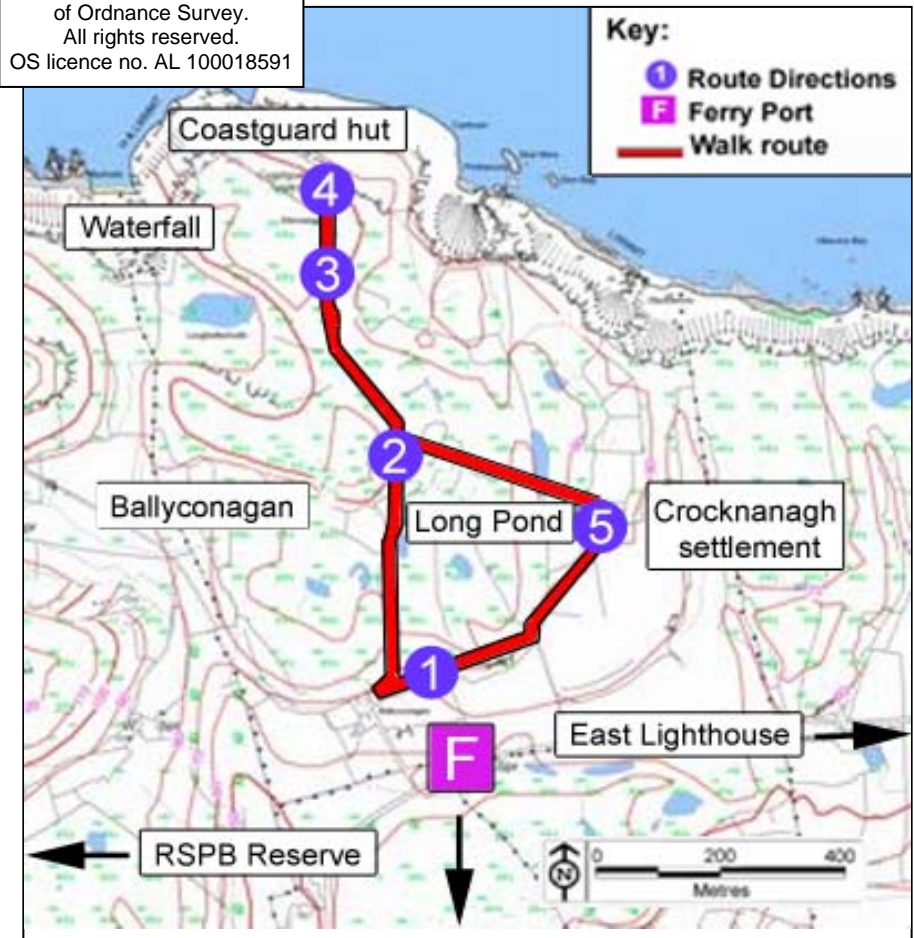
Route and directions...

The Coastguard's Track is waymarked with blue markers and is the most popular route for walkers to get to the Coastguard Hut. There are also two other waymarked trails which link with this walk, marked with red and green markers. These trails offer walkers the chance to do a loop walk, taking in the old Crocknanagh settlement.

From the harbour, follow the road up a steep hill until you arrive at the Island's Chapel and Primary School. At this point follow the sign posts for East Lighthouse and after 0.25 miles, take the first stone laneway on your left. At the start of this laneway, there is a National Trust sign with trail information.

1. The Coastguard's Track begins here. At the top of the laneway, turn right and cross a wooden stile. Proceed on for a short distance, then taking a left turn, follow the rough stone track through banks of tall gorse bushes (known as whin in this part of Ireland).
2. After passing by the whins, the habitat quickly changes to open heathland & fen mire. Here the grassland is very species rich, with many rare orchids. Here the track becomes less obvious, as it passes through an ancient field system.
3. Throughout this section of the trail, the Coastguard Hut is in view. The hut is on a prominent hill (one of the highest points on Rathlin) at 120 metres. The final climb to the hut passes through a striking 'moonscape' of exposed heather hummocks, which are regularly bashed by strong Atlantic winds.
4. The Coastguard Hut, where magnificent views of the Scottish Isles can be had, including Islay, Jura, Arran & the Mull of Kintyre.
5. At this point, walkers should retrace their steps to point 2 on the map, and then follow the red waymarker posts, heading left or eastwards. This shorter trail ends up at the historical Crocknanagh settlement, which can be soft underfoot at times. From the old settlement, turn right passing through a grassland area, which is thought to have been cultivated at one time. Exit the grass fields, over another wooden stile and you will pass through more gorse, before arriving back at point 1 on the map.

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Walk distance, terrain and accessibility... 1.5 miles/2 km circular route. Some of the terrain you will encounter is naturally wet and/or rocky; please ensure you are wearing suitable footwear. The land surrounding this walk is owned by local farmers; please do not walk beyond the boundaries without obtaining prior permission. There are livestock present all year round in this area; please remember to close gates behind you and **keep dogs on leads at all time.**

As a charity, independent of government, the National Trust relies on the generosity of its supporters to continue caring for our countryside and wildlife, so that everyone can enjoy the beauty of the outdoors for generations to come.

Find out more at www.nationaltrust.org.uk