

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 Crocknanagh Trail is waymarked with green markers until you reach point 4 on the map, where you can then follow the path back towards the Coastguard Hut. There are also shorter waymarked trails, marked with red and blue markers.

1. Begin your walk at the Coastguard Hut and, following the green waymarkers, continue straight ahead until you reach a fork in the path.
2. Where the path forks take the left hand trail, all the while following the green waymarkers. The path will take you between two small ponds on either side; the pond to your right is called 'Portnacooly Pond'. Cross over a stony path which cuts across the track and continue straight ahead until the path curves round to the right.
3. The corner of this path is right on the edge of the northern side of the island and offers fantastic views of the coast over the cliff-tops, where you may spot seals playing in the sea. Further afield, on a clear day, you can see the western isles and the coast of Scotland.

Follow the path as it bends round to the right, with Stackmore Pond in the corner on your right, continuing straight ahead and passing Long Pond on your right. This pond once provided water for Crocknanagh settlement, in addition to reeds which were used for thatching. Continue to follow the path as it curves to the right, passing the Crocknanagh settlement (see first image on page 1 of this walk), just after which the path joins up with the red waymarked path.

4. Take a sharp right, following the path downhill. You will pass a number of swampy ponds and walk through an ancient field system, where heather and mire have been replaced with grassland, which is thought to have been cultivated at one time.
5. The path here forks sharply to the right. Take the left hand fork which curves gently round to the left; this path heads right back up to the Coastguard Hut and the cliffs, passing the waterfall to your left which has formed a large pond. Continue past this until you once again reach the Coastguard Hut, where you can finish your walk with wonderful views over the island's coastline.

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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**.

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