Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership works with partners and stakeholders to ensure sustainable management of the AONB which relies

This coastal area follows the shores of a nearly landlocked inland sea and extends inland up the Quoile River, dominated by the historic town of Downpatrick, and south along the outward-facing shore of the Irish Sea. The lowland landforms tell the story of Northern Ireland’s glacial past; drumlin hills poking from sea to form the hundreds of islets of Strangford Lough. Perhaps nowhere else in Northern Ireland is the interplay between land and water so evident. Not only is there contrast between the expansive open Lough and sea and the surrounding hilltops, but also at a smaller scale between the marshy hollows and river valleys and the ‘basket of eggs’ hills that contain them. The character of the shores varies too, from the Lough’s extensive mudflats (so valuable to the wintering wildfowl) to rocky bays, sweeping sandy strands and soft low cliffs on coast fringing the Irish Sea.

At the northern end of Strangford Lough, Scrabo Hill capped by its tower forms a prominent landmark. Below the waters, the hidden riches of this habitat have led to the Lough being designated as a marine nature reserve. As one travels south, you reach the windswept Lecale area, remote in character and with a distinctive local identity strongly influenced by the area’s numerous ancient sites and attractive coastal settlements. Killard Point and Cloghy Rocks are excellent places to quietly watch the life of the seal colonies.

Towards Dundrum Bay, the area is increasingly influenced by the brooding presence of the Mourne Mountains; the low hills of Lecale affording spectacular views across the bay to the hills beyond.

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Description: Popular coastal walk from the National Trust Kearney Village along the coast to Knockineldar Bay and back by road.

Type: Easy walk much of which is path and country lane but there is a need to cross some sandy, rocky and boulder shores at Knockineldar.

Duration: approximately 1 hour

Look out for: The displays of the rural settlement at Kearney. There are beautiful coastal plants from May through to June. You may see seals hauled out along the way. There are interesting rock formations and rock pools. The walk will provide views of Quintin Castle and, on a clear day, the Isle of Man.

Start: Kearney National Trust property or Knockineldar Bay.

Parking: Kearney Village National Trust Car Park or car park at Knockineldar Bay.

Please Remember to
Leave No Trace

Plan Ahead and Prepare
Be Considerate of Others
Respect Farm Animals and Wildlife
Travel and Camp on Durable Ground
Leave What You Find
Dispose of Waste Properly
Minimise the Effects of Fire
Description: Access to Killard Point is by walking around the shore or across the field by the wooden kissing gate. At first the path is very stony but it improves once you reach the base of the plateau.

Type: Moderate linear route on roads, paths and on the shore. The shore section of this walk is rough underfoot. Stay safe and keep clear of the soft eroding cliffs and cliff edges.

Length and time: 4.3 km (2.7 miles) for the return of this linear walk and would take approximately 1½ hours.

Start: The Coastguard Cottages

Parking: The car park near the Coastguard Cottages, Killard Road

Look out for: The amazing variety of coastal grassland wildflowers in the spring right through to the orchids in June and July. The fulmars and sand martins nesting in the soft sandy cliffs. The raised beaches formed by the last ice age. The rocks that jut out to sea are over 500 million years old and covered in lichens. The views of Ballyquinnt Point, over the Irish Sea and, on a clear day, you can see the Isle of Man.
Killyleagh - The Shore Loney

Description: this walk takes you through the town of Killyleagh long the shore over the Dibney River and along the shore to Holm Bay. To avoid getting wet, this section should only be walked at low tide. The walk then takes you back into Killyleagh and to the Killowen Graveyard.

Length and time: 3.64 km (2.3 miles) for the circular walk and would take approximately 1½ hours.

Type: Moderate circular route on roads, paths and on the shore. The shore section of this walk is rough underfoot and is best done at low tide.

Look out for: Killyleagh Castle which dates back to the 1600s and is the oldest in Ireland that is still inhabited. The Town Rock Light, this brick tower was built as a navigational aid for the commercial vessels of the past. The Killowen Graveyard and Mary's Stile. The graveyard houses many of the victims of the first Irish Famine. The greylag geese, mute swans, teal and snipe that overwinter along the shore and on the marshy areas between the drumlins. The views of Durnynnell Island which have the remains of an ancient rampart and defense system.

Start and Parking: The car park on the Shrigley Road

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NIEA Northern Ireland Environment Agency
DUP Down Council

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Description: This walk takes you south along the shore and tip of the Ards Peninsula and back through the countryside.

Type: Easy to moderate circular/linear walk on roads with off road paths on the Point

Length and time: 14 km (8.6 miles) for the circular walk and would take approximately 5½ hours. The linear walk to Ballyquintin Point would be 12.2 km (7.6 miles) return and would take approximately 5 hours. A shorter walk at Ballyquintin Farm to the Point and Nature Reserve is also available 1.3-2.6 km (0.8-1.6 miles) which would take approximately 40 mins to 1 hour.

Look out for: The Cooney Wells and ruins of the church and graveyard, an ancient pilgrimage site. The raised beaches formed at the end of the last Ice Age. The seals hailed out along the shore and the migrating birds and insects. The Bar Mouth, where the Irish Sea meets Strangford Lough where over 64 vessels have been shipwrecked. The coastal wildflowers on Ballyquintin Point. The fabulous views to the Irish Sea and the Isle of Man, as well as west and north over the Narrows and the Mourne mountains.

Start and Parking: The Square car park or along the shore in Portaferry or the Ballyquintin Farm car park
Description: Nugent's Wood is owned by the National Trust and the path takes you through wonderful mixed woodland. Pass through the kissing gate and follow the grassy path parallel to the shore and through the trees. A short loop at the far end rejoins the main path to retrace your steps back to the car park.

Type: Easy route with a single kissing gate at the start of the walk with a gentle incline along the path. An optional section at the far end goes up a short flight or steps.

Look out for: Views of Strangford Lough and the Narrows. The rare red squirrels and the woodland flowers, particularly in spring. Views of Castle Ward and Audley's Castle.

Length and time: 1.6 km (1 mile) return and would take approximately 1 hour.

Start: On the Shore Road near the Ferry terminal. Walk up the drive of the houses and along the wall of the Shore Road.

Parking: At Exploris car park or along the Shore Road in Portaferry.
Description: The longer circular route takes you through Portaferry and into the surrounding countryside and over the Mountain Road for wonderful views of Strangford Lough. The linear route to Marlefield Bay takes you along the shore.

Length and time: 9.5 km (5.9 miles) in length and would take approximately 3 hours for the circular route. Or 2½ hours to walk the linear route to Marlefield Bay and back.

Type: Easy linear route to Marlefield Bay on country roads. The Mountain Road circular route is moderate with hills but still on roads and country lanes.

Start and Parking: Ferry Terminal car park or along the Shore Road.


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Description: This walk takes you through Portaferry and onto the highest point overlooking the surrounding countryside.

Type: Easy linear walk on roads and paths

Length and time: 1.6 km (1 mile) return and would take approximately 1 hour.

Look out for: The windmill built in 1771 by the Savage family and almost completely destroyed by fire in 1878. The gorse and the grassland flowers, especially in spring and summer. There are fabulous views all around - south and east over the tip of the Ards peninsula to the Irish Sea and the Isle of Man, as well as west and north over the Narrows, the Mourne mountains, Strangford Lough and the dunsills of Lecale.

Start: The Square in Portaferry

Parking: The Square car park
Description: Popular circular coastal walk through the village of Strangford and along the coast to Black Causeway and back by road.

Type: Easy circular walk much of which is on good paths, country lanes and roads.

Length and Time: 2.1 km (1.3 miles) on a circular route that will take approximately 40 minutes

Look out for: Strangford Castle, a 15th Century Tower House in the centre of the village. The Terns feeding offshore and nesting on Swan Island during the summer. Grey and common seals swimming in the narrows. Spectacular views over the Narrows to Portaferry and across Castletown Bay.

Start: Strangford Village.

Parking: Strangford Village Car Park
Description: A short walk onto Sketrick Island from the car park on the Whiterock Road gives an easy walk on one of the most accessible of Strangford Lough's islands.

Length and time: 1.6 km (1 mile) for the circular walk and would take approximately ½ to 1 hour.

Type: Easy circular walk on roads and paths on the island but with a short stretch across a causeway.

Look out for: Sketrick Castle, the ruin of a tower house built in the 15th Century was a strong hold in the wars of the 16th Century and, finally, collapsed in a storm of 1896. There are magnificent views of the islands - these are in fact drowned drumlins and are some of seventy or so of Strangford Lough's islands. Some of the backroads around the Whiterock area give amazing views of the Lough and its islands.

Start: The causeway to Sketrick Island

Parking: The car park on the Whiterock road