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HEATHERY HEIGHTS MONTHLY

Articles, walks and news



CRUACH MOR, DUNARDRY AND THE HISTORIC CRINAN CANAL

A canal through time...

This walk explores a section of the Crinan Canal and its surrounds to offer a varied mix which can be undertaken as a whole or easily split into bite sized chunks depending on ability and time. Starting with an ascent to the summit of Cruach Mor (214m), overlooking the Moine Mhor National Nature Reserve towards the ancient Iron Age Fort of Dunadd, the walk then leads past the tumbling falls of Dunardry Burn down to Dunardry Locks before following the quiet contemplative waters of the historic Canal to Crinan Basin, New York and ancient woods.



The walk

1. Leaving the car park turn right onto the forestry track. For this section you will be following the yellow posts for the 'Dunardry Trail' - anticlockwise - starting with the canal running parallel on your right. After 250m, to your left, you will see the path down which you will be returning next to a sign board. Continue ahead for the next ½ km until you come to a Y-junction.

2. Veer left, ignoring the orange posted track to your right. Your route will now climb gradually heading in a general south westerly direction. After 750m you will notice a forestry track to the left and a path coming up from your right. Ignore both and continue straight on for 400m, following the yellow posts past a small quarry, until you reach a T-junction.

3. Turn left. The track will curve gently left for 500m, passing an old settlement, before a sharp right hand bend. Directly on the left hand side of the bend take a small path signposted to the viewpoint of Cruach Mor ('Great Conical Hill' or 'Stack'). Initially steep, the path soon levels out to lead you to the trig point at 214 m, the highest point of the day's walk. From here a superb 360° panorama can be taken in with particularly good views over to Jura, Scarba, Mull, Dunadd and the incredible blanket bog of the Moine Mhor ('Great Moss'), a place diverse with wildlife and one of Europe's most threatened habitats. To descend return down the path to rejoin the forestry track.

4. Turn left. The track drops southwards to a bridge over the Dunardry Burn. Your route following the yellow posts takes you left just before the burn. Continue until you meet a junction offering a choice of green, blue and yellow routes. You can now either choose to stay on the yellow route - an easy amble with views down to the gorge - or do some exploration on the blue route or green route before rejoining the yellow route. The blue route is easy whereas the green route drops you down on a mini circuit of Dunardry gorge and does have some steep uneven sections, taking you down to the bridges over the falls.

5. Rejoin or continue on the yellow route through tall mature coniferous woodland until you reach the junction and sign board you passed near the start. Turn right towards the carpark, a good spot to take a break and admire the fine workmanship of the Dunardry Locks below. It is hard to believe that back in 1859 disaster struck here and a large part of the canal and road were destroyed due to the collapse of a reservoir dam. The Crinan Canal has a colourful history from its inception under James Watt and John Rennie between 1771 and 1801 - and necessary redesign under Thomas Telford - to the many trade and fishing vessels that plied her followed by Royalty and tourism.



Safety in the Outdoors

Please continue to adhere to current guidelines as set out by the government, exercise responsibly and use appropriate clothing and equipment for your chosen outdoor activity. Consider informing a contact about your route/whereabouts and don't forget your phone, snacks, drink, any medication/first aid supplies you may need and to check weather conditions. Please keep your dog under close control, especially around livestock and wildlife, and be aware some open areas of moorland may have snares in use. Please follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

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The Crinan Canal cut out the need to round the Mull of Kintyre, renowned for its rough seas and strong tides. Look out for the useful information boards en route.....

6. Continue down to the road and turn left, crossing with care. After 100m turn right onto a track in front of a house and cross over the lock gates (lock 9) to the other side of the canal. Note the size of the gates made for large seagoing traffic.

7. Turn left onto the towpath. The walk is now an easy 5.5km amble all the way to Crinan Basin, passing close by Moine Mhor and the River Add estuary. Look out for the many water fowl, dragonflies, butterflies and abundance of wild flowers in summer. You may even spot an otter and can often see swallows swooping to catch flies. At Crinan Basin the hotel and coffee shop offer refreshments or enjoy a picnic overlooking Loch Crinan where the canal meets the open sea.

8. Leaving Crinan Basin walk through the car park to a path leading along the south side of the canal. At Gate 14 turn right onto the red marked trail, which you will follow to the Swing Bridge (there are information boards to help you en route). Steep in places this delightful path now meanders up onto a small hill through ancient woodlands, much loved by red squirrels, with numerous viewpoints over Crinan Bay. On dropping slightly to a house you come out onto a small lane. 50m to your right you will come to a signpost marked "New York' ruins'.



9. Turn left. This will take you over another small ridge. At the signpost turn left to 'New York' ruins, a line of old cottages that were once lived in by canal workers. From New York return to the signpost. Continuing ahead (signposted Dun Mor) the path cuts across a col to a T-junction, turn left to Dun Mor. The path ascends briefly but steeply to the summit of this ancient hill fort with lovely views over to Crinan Ferry and Duntrune Castle.

10. Continue over the fort and the path will meander awhile before dropping steeply to a lane leading to the Swing Bridge. Cross the bridge back to the towpath and turn right. You can now retrace your steps to Dunardry Forestry car park, remembering to cross back over the canal at Lock 9!

The described route and accompanying information are there to be used as a guide and do not replace the use of map and compass and the skills required to use them. Whilst every effort is made to ensure the route is accurate at the time of going to print please be aware that track and path closures can happen at any time. All walks are undertaken at your own risk.

Walk Information

Route: Cruach Mor, Dunardry and the historic Crinan Canal

Distance: 17km

Ascent: 485m

Time: 5-5.5 hours walking plus 2 hours for exploration and lunch

Terrain: tracks, tow path and paths; some steep uneven & roughly stepped sections

Map/s: OS Landranger 55 (1:50 000)
OS Explorer 358 (1:25 000)

Start/Finish: Dunardry Forestry car park

Grid Reference: Dunardry NR 823908

Parking: Car park

Public Transport: limited bus service (425/426)

Toilets: Crinan

