



JANUARY 2023

# HEATHERY HEIGHTS MONTHLY

*Articles, walks and news*



NEXT ISSUE  
Kilmartin Glen

## **GANAVAN & DUNSTAFFNAGE**

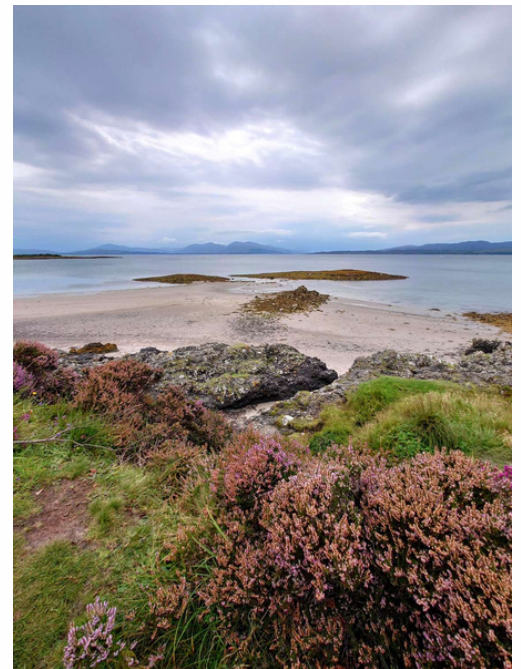
*From WWII Seaplanes to a 13th Century Stronghold...*

Arriving at the lovely bay of Ganavan one can easily forget that the bustling harbour of Oban lies just round the corner as one gazes out over the Firth of Lorn to Mull, the hills of Morvern and Lismore.

Reminders usually come in the shape of one of the large ferries that plie the waters and a glance behind indicates this is now a residential area, although it was a holiday resort in the past. But this quiet bay also had other uses, particularly in WWII.



Looking towards Eilean Mor and Benderloch



View across the Firth of Lorn

Nearby on the north end of Kerrera, RAF Coastal Command Oban had its flying boat (seaplane) base which were used to patrol the North Atlantic. However, to safely maintain them required space and sheltered waters. This Ganavan Bay offered and both a hangar and slipway were built. The old slipway can still be seen and a memorial to those who served can be found at the south end of the bay. The Ganavan to Dunbeg cycle way also has a flying boat depicted on its gate.

Walking up the coast one would have seen Royal Navy and Merchant ships rather than ferries at that time but turn the clock further back and the seafaring vessels would have been very different. At the time Dunstaffnage Castle was built by the MacDougalls in the mid-13th Century the birlinn (west highland galley) was the usual means of seagoing transport for trade, cattle, goods and, of course, battle.

Dunstaffnage Castle itself was a Royal stronghold and an important one guarding the entrance to Loch Etive. It saw many battles and was besieged by Robert the Bruce following his victory at the Pass of Brander over the MacDougalls. It eventually passed into the hands of the Campbells as did the nearby Chapel, which was also originally built by the MacDougalls. Both the Castle and Chapel are worth of a visit.

### **The walk**

above steep cliffy edges, initially going northwards.

4. As you reach higher ground the path will turn northeast, the highest point of Ganavan Hill can easily be reached by taking a right fork (the paths re-join after the hill). From the summit descend north (quite steep) to cross a small stream before ascending up and over the smaller bump of Aonadh Beag.

5. The path now descends northeast parallel to the coast down grassy sometimes slightly boggy ground. There is a large new development to your right. It is best to drop down to the paths that hug the coast as soon as you can. You will cross a couple of areas where there is evidence that future development may be in the offing, but the small stony bays and rocks make for pleasant and easy exploration and walking.

### **Safety in the Outdoors**

*Please exercise responsibly and use appropriate clothing and equipment for your chosen outdoor activity. Inform a contact about your route/whereabouts and don't forget your phone, snacks, drink, medication and first aid supplies. Check the forecast and mountain 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, bylaws and laws that protect areas including National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs).*

[www.heatheryheights.co.uk](http://www.heatheryheights.co.uk)

1. Parking is available at Ganavan Sands (Pay & Display) or you can use the Oban to Ganavan bus. Leaving the north end of the car park, follow a path that takes you directly up the edge of Ganavan bay. Easy walking at first it does start to meander amongst the rocks as you leave the north end of the bay.

2. After ½ km you will come to a stream. Turn right and head up a shallow valley for a short distance (130m) before veering left where a steeper narrow path leads up onto the slopes on the right side of the stream (the bracken can be quite tall in summer but the path is usually obvious enough).

3. The path crosses the stream higher up before hugging the coast

6. As you round the small headland you reach Camas Rubha na Liathaig. The path will lead you round the bay past several modern buildings that include the Ocean Explorer Centre and Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS).
7. At the north end of the bay enter pretty woodlands, meandering close to the bays. After just 200m you may spot Dunstaffnage Chapel through the trees to your right. Keep going until you come to a small path leading right (otherwise it is VERY muddy) and after a short distance you will reach a good quality path leading right up to the ruined Chapel where dog-toothed ornamentation can still be seen.
8. Return down the path but now continue straight ahead to reach the main track at Dunstaffnage Castle's SW corner. You can view the Castle from the outside and explore the surrounding headland. If you wish to enter there is a fee (check with Historic Environment Scotland for seasonal opening times).
9. From the Castle take the main path south past Dunstaffnage Bay towards Dunbeg. After you reach the car park continue along Kirk Road for a short distance and you will see the Ocean Explorer Centre ahead to your right. The centre has excellent displays and entry is free. There is also a Café, a good spot to have a break.
10. Continue down Kirk Road for 1km after the Ocean Explorer Centre and then run right onto Lorn Road. (The route is now marked back to Ganavan and is part of a core cycle network.) Take the second right, staying briefly on Lorn Road, before turning left on to Lochnell Road. Follow the road for 300m and take the right fork that leads onto the cycle route.
11. It is now an easy amble back to Ganavan Sands.

Note: If you wish to leave the cycle route and return on the coastal path you used on your outward walk there are several paths leading back to Aonadh Beag and Ganavan Hill to your right (which will add on a little distance and time). You can also retrace your steps from the Ocean Explorer Centre where a small path next to the building leads you down to the bay of Camas Rubha na Liathaig.

## Walk Information

**Route: Ganavan and Dunstaffnage**

**Distance: 7.6 km (4.75 miles)**

**Ascent: 180 m**

**Time: 2.5 - 3 hours (allow extra time if visiting the Castle and Ocean Explorer Centre)**

**Terrain: Mixture of road, tracks and paths with some steep uneven sections**

**Map/s: OS Landranger 49 (1:50 000) and OS Explorer 359 (1:25 000)**

**Start/Finish/Parking: Ganavan Sands car park**

**Grid reference: NM 862 326**

**Public Transport: Bus 417 Oban to Ganavan (or 405/005 if start at Dunstaffnage)**

**Toilets: Ganavan Sands**

**[OS Map Link](#)**



A longer 10 mile walk from Oban can also be found [here](#)

*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. Further information on routes and updates from Forestry & Land Scotland can be found [here](#)*