



MARCH 2023

HEATHERY HEIGHTS MONTHLY

Articles, walks and news



NEXT ISSUE
Cruach Tairbeirt &
Loch to Loch Trails

ST COLUMBA'S FOOTPRINTS & DUNAVERTY BAY

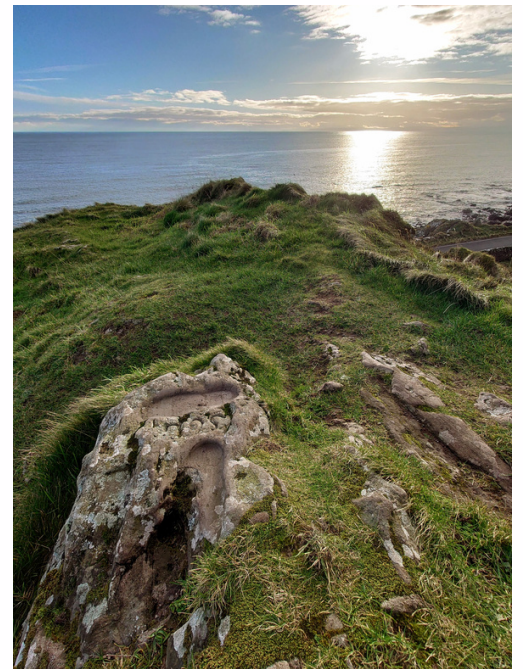
Geology, St Columba and bloody history...

With breath-taking views southwards, Kintyre's southern headland juts prominently towards Ireland, its ancient Old Red Sandstone and Dalradian cliffs pocked with sea caves, some, like those at Keil, lying high and dry above stunning beaches and rocky promontories. It is easy to forget that sea levels here were some 10 -12m higher as glaciers retreated and lands rebounded from the sheer force of ice.

With such close connections to Ireland it should be no surprise that this headland is associated with St Columba's journey from Donegal to Scotland in 563AD. St Columba's life is well accounted for in the book 'Vita Columbae' – The Life of Columba – written by the ninth Abbot of Iona Abbey, Adomnan some 100 years after St Columba's death.



Keil Caves



St Columba's footprints

The walk can be undertaken from Keil carpark, although some may prefer to park by the road at Dunaverty Bay.



Kilmcolmkill church and graveyard

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

The walk

1. From the car park at Keil turn left along the road, you will immediately gain fantastic views south, east and west.

To the east lies Sanda, an island that has seen its share of shipwrecks, catching out vessels plying their way back and forth to the Clyde – enough that it was eventually given its own lighthouse in 1850. This did not prevent every shipwreck but no doubt it saved far more with its presence. Beyond is the igneous intrusion of Ailsa Craig and the distant Ayrshire coast.

To the west the bulky headland boasting the Mull of Kintyre overlooks tidal waters which can become incredibly rough with big seas running in from the Atlantic, particularly on a westerly. The lighthouse on the Mull was built in 1788 and is worthy of a visit whilst in the area. Here you are much closer to Ireland than the rest of mainland Scotland, roughly half the distance.

2. To your left you will see the Old Red Sandstone cliffs and caves on the other side of a wall. Continue for a short distance and you will see a gate on your left. Go through

this and you can take the grassy path left to go and explore the caves – watch out for low flying rock doves (pigeons)! If there is a sea running listen carefully as you can hear the sound of the waves breaking as they echo off the cliffs.

3. Return towards the gate and head up some steps on your left, these will lead you to Columba's footprints and the well. The carved-out footprint in the Old Red Sandstone is associated with St Columba making his first landing before continuing north up the west coast and on to Iona. The second footprint is believed to have been carved out by a local in the 19th Century to add to the story (despite saying 564). A little beyond is the well and you can look down into the cemetery over the ivy-covered wall.

4. Return down the steps to the road and turn left. If you wish to visit the chapel, it is on your left. Also given St Columba's name it is now a ruin although the cemetery is still in use. Roofless, this parish church of Kilmcolmkill is believed to date back to the 12th or 13th Centuries (Canmore ID ref 38285).

5. Continuing along the road there are a few spots you may wish to access for views before continuing to Dunaverty Bay. Here a path drops down some steps past the public toilets (handy) and onto the beach. Continue round until you can access the grassy path up to the Old Lifeboat Station. Dunaverty offered a prime spot from which to send a lifeboat to rescue those poor souls who found themselves in difficulty. Built in 1869 the site was used for many years with a further boatshed added in 1904 to house a larger lifeboat with easier access into the water. Nevertheless, with modern technology and faster boats able to make haste from Campbeltown the station was eventually closed. After years of lying derelict, the old lifeboat station and boathouse were purchased privately in 1982 and are largely restored.

6. If you fancy the steep and precipitous clamber up to the summit of Dunaverty Rock then you will need to turn right and go through the gate past the old station then immediately left onto the narrow path that leads to its summit. Do take care as there are cliffs on all sides. Its superb outlook and protection on three sides resulted in it becoming a stronghold in the 8th Century for the race of Gabran and grandson of Fergus of Dalriada (Canmore ID ref 38302). Its turbulent and bloody history includes Robert the Bruce narrowly missing capture and the 1647 massacre. In 1647 Royalists took refuge at Dunaverty under the leadership of Archibald MacDonald of Sanda during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (British Civil Wars). Besieged and with no water they had surrendered only to be massacred by the forces under the leadership of General Leslie. There is little to see now, and it is likely the fortifications were dismantled in the 17th Century, one can but imagine the battles from land and sea.

7. From the Old Lifeboat Station, it is worth walking up onto the grassy headland for great views along the coast and to Dunaverty Rock. Veer back by Roaring Cove to pick up the track leading north through the golf course*. Initially following the burn, it then continues up past the Clubhouse to Southend Village.

8. At the village you can now either turn left and return along the road to Keil carpark (nearly 2km) or go right and walk the short distance to Muneroy Tearoom and Stores – check opening times in advance, they have fabulous cake! Return along the road to Keil carpark*.

9. If you have time Carskey Bay makes for a lovely extension and is just west of the carpark. The beach is nearly 1km long.

*You can also return via Dunaverty Bay either via the Old Lifeboat Station or down the north side of the golf course if returning down the track from the tearoom.

Walk Information

Route: St Columba's Footprint and Dunaverty Bay

Distance: 5.8 to 6.7km (3½ to 4 miles)

Ascent: 110m

Time: 2 to 3 hours

Terrain: Mixture of road, track, and grassy paths. Very steep exposed sections if go out to Dunaverty Rock

Map/s: OS Landranger 68 (1:50 000)

OS Explorer 356 (1:25 000)

Start/Finish/Parking: Car Park by Keil Caves (further parking at west end of Dunaverty Bay by Public Toilets)

Grid reference: NR 670 077

Public Transport: 444 (limited service at weekends)

Toilets: Yes, at west end of Dunaverty Bay

OS Map link



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](#)