

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Portsoy-Sandend-Old King's Road Circular (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

At just over our usual limit of 10 km, this is a mostly gentle walking excursion on the cliff-tops, likely to fill the lungs with fresh sea air! Although on a different scale, the harbour areas of both Portsoy and Sandend have a very attractive old-world feel about them.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Stagecoach run frequent bus services that pass through Portsoy. Check timetables. There are parking spaces at various points on Links Road near to the walk start/finish point.

Length: 10.410 km / 6.51 mi

Height Gain: 221 meter **Height Loss:** 221 meter

Max Height: 69 meter **Min Height:** 0 meter

Surface: Moderate. Mostly good paths, beach and minor tarred road. Not suitable for off-road mobility scooters due to steep steps from clifftop approaching Sandend beach.

Child Friendly: Yes, if children are used to walks of this distance and overall ascent. Please take care near cliff edges.

Difficulty: Medium.

Dog Friendly: Yes, but keep dogs on lead on public roads and near to any livestock. Please take care near cliff edges.

Refreshments: Options in Portsoy.



Description

This is a bracing cliff-top walk with a particular interest when seabirds are nesting. Passed on the way, the 600 m sandy beach Sandend is understandably popular on sunny summer days, while it attracts surfers at all times of the year. A large section of the return route follows the old coastal road, the King's Highway, now a grassy farm-track and minor access road. The route starts and finishes at the charming and lively harbour area of Portsoy. The burgh was established by Mary, Queen of Scots, in 1550, and the first harbour was built at that time. Today, many old buildings, dating back to the end of the 1600s or early 1700s, survive to enhance the surroundings of the Old Harbour. We strongly recommend a visit to the Salmon Bothy museum, situated at the start and end point of the walk. The former working salmon fishing house has been sensitively restored and showcases displays and information about Portsoy, its industries and trade over the centuries, its harbours and the salmon fishing operations. For more information and opening times see:

<https://salmonbothy.org/museum/>. The pretty village of Sandend is the turning point of the walk and was well established by the early 1600s. Just outside the village you will spot the impressive 4-storey base structure of the Glassaugh Windmill, sitting close to the Glenglassaugh Distillery. The King's Highway section between Sandend and Portsoy provides fine views of the surrounding countryside and a particularly attractive approach to Portsoy. This quiet lane is the old main coastal road and was used by 18th C travellers such as James Boswell and Robert Burns on their travels around the NE of Scotland.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Salmon Bothy centre

(57.68529; -2.68642) <https://w3w.co/peroxide.song.insist>
Start the walk outside the Salmon Bothy* centre on Links Road. Facing the Bothy, turn right and walk to the harbour on Shore Street. Walk all the way around the harbour, passing the Portsoy Marble shop-front, heading towards the very obvious dolphin sculpture on the headland at the end of the harbour.

**Note: A former working salmon fishing house, the Salmon Bothy has been restored and now comprises a museum, a base for family history research and a community space and venue. The museum showcases displays, artefacts and information about Portsoy's harbours, the industry and trade and the salmon fishing operations. Admission is free. For more information and opening times see: <https://salmonbothy.org/museum/>*



(2) Left and up to dolphin sculpture

(57.68539; -2.69135) <https://w3w.co/bluff.shears.rings>
After about 450 m, at the western end of the harbour go left and up the path to the area with the dolphin sculpture. After checking out the views, veer left to take the narrow path around the side of the hillside (a little precipitous in places), then pass some old buildings on your left side. (462 m)



(3) Left and up to houses

(57.68510; -2.69243) <https://w3w.co/trifling.smoking.trucks>
In 120 m, as the track goes right and heads uphill towards the rocky shore, pass by a bar to stop vehicles and take the steep path left up towards the houses on the cliff-top. At the top of the path, turn right to follow the cliff-top coastal path to Sandend. Follow this coastal path for about 4.5 km until the western end of the Sandend beach, at the start of the old village. During your progress along the cliff-top path, ignore all turn-offs to right and left! (583 m)



(4) Leave beach and turn right into Sandend

(57.68324; -2.74798) <https://w3w.co/beaks.delivers.drilled>
In 4.6 km, after crossing the Sandend beach, take a path that exits the beach and turn right onto Seaview Road and walk into the old part of Sandend village. (5.2 km)



(5) Harbour at Sandend

(57.68659; -2.74697) <https://w3w.co/gravy.sued.splints>

After 500 m, or so, you will have arrived at the end of the farthest pier at the little harbour. After checking out the scene and the views, re-trace your steps back through the village, passing the point where you joined Seaview Road after emerging from the beach. Watch out for a public toilets block ahead of you on your left after a fish-processing facility on your right. (5.7 km)



(6) Left before public toilets

(57.68288; -2.74889) <https://w3w.co/smoothly.chatters.strain>

In just over 500 m, go left off Seaview Road before the public toilets building into a small car-park, then veer left towards a path for the beach, passing an information board about the village. Follow the path towards the stream (Scattery Burn) then right onto the grassy area with caravans. Here you will see a little pedestrian bridge over the burn ahead of you on your left. (6.2 km)



(7) Across bridge and take Dunes Path

(57.68249; -2.74784) <https://w3w.co/beard.sums.husky>

In 200 m, or so, from turning off Seaview Road, cross the pedestrian bridge over the Scattery Burn and go straight ahead on the path marked for the "Dunes". Take the path at the top of the dunes, above the beach, as it heads back in the Portsoy direction, towards the cliffside at the eastern end of Sandend Beach. Near the end of the beach, drop down from the dunes path to the beach level. (6.4 km)



(8) Leave beach up the steps

(57.68192; -2.73843) <https://w3w.co/salmon.nooks.trend>

In 600 m at the eastern end of Sandend Beach, climb up the steps that you descended earlier on the outward leg of the walk. Once at the cliff-top keep following the path, retracing your earlier route. Note the remains of the old Glassaugh Windmill*, perhaps 250 m away, beside the distillery on your right side. (7.0 km)

**Note: Mid 18th century, possibly 1761. 4-storey tapering circular windmill encompassed by circular platform base. [Historic Environment Scotland]*



(9) Carry straight on at gate on King's Road

(57.68301; -2.73103)

<https://w3w.co/providing.overdrive.manicured>

In 400 m, at a gate that you passed when following the coastal path on the outward section, carry straight on, ignoring the coastal path to your left. The very straight grassy road you can see stretching out ahead of is the old "King's Highway*". Keep following this grassy road uphill. At the low hilltop the narrow road becomes tarred. Follow this very quiet tarred road back into the outskirts of Portsoy. (7.4 km)

Note: The King's Highway between Sandend and Portsoy is the old main coastal road and was used by 18th C travellers such as James Boswell and Robert Burns on their travels around the NE of Scotland.



(10) Left at junction on Park Crescent

(57.68203; -2.69859) <https://w3w.co/polices.flattens.forks>

In 2 km, after entering outskirts of Portsoy, with houses on either side now, veer left at the junction on Park Crescent and continue heading towards the centre of Portsoy. (9.4 km)



(11) Left down North High Street to harbour

(57.68333; -2.69128) <https://w3w.co/hedge.revisit.cowering>

In 500 m, at a x-roads, go left and down North High Street towards the harbour. Upon reaching the Shore Head road at the harbour-side, turn right and walk along Shore Head past the Shore Inn towards steps up the hillside beside the Boat Shed buildings. (9.9 km)



(12) Veer right and up steps at The Boat Shed

(57.68456; -2.69013) <https://w3w.co/guideline.throwaway.internet>
In 200 m, passing a sign for The Boat Shed, veer right and climb the steps up the cliff-side. Very soon you will pass through a community garden where the centre-piece is the 'Liberty' – A Fifie Fishing Boat**. Carry on up the path until it joins Schoolhendry Street. (10.1 km)

**Note: The Portsoy Boatshed is a "... purpose built, well equipped workshop with the machines and traditional tools to build boats. Home to a team of enthusiastic volunteers with a passion for wooden boat building, you are certain of a friendly welcome and a hearty chat as they share their skills, knowledge and learnings ..."*
[see: <http://portsoyboatshed.org/>]



***Note: The Liberty was built and used for small-line, hand-line and creel fishing along the eastern Moray Firth coast. See the story here: http://toonloon.bizland.com/ppap/?page_id=4784*

(13) Left onto Schoolhendry Street then right down path

(57.68489; -2.68861) <https://w3w.co/crispier.butlers.result>
In 100 m, or so, when the path meets Schoolhendry Street, turn left, then very quickly go right down a pathway that will take you to the back of the Salmon Bothy building, then around to the front of the Bothy where you started the walk. (10.2 km)



(14) Finish walk back at Salmon Bothy area

(57.68523; -2.68642) <https://w3w.co/peroxide.song.insist>
In 200 m, you are back at the place where you started the walk outside the front of the Salmon Bothy* building where the walk ends. (10.4 km)

**Note: A former working salmon fishing house, the Salmon Bothy has been restored and now comprises a museum, a base for family history research and a community space and venue. The museum showcases displays, artefacts and information about Portsoy's harbours, the industry and trade and the salmon fishing operations. Admission is free. For more information and opening times see: <https://salmonbothy.org/museum/>*

Route Map



Links:

[Photos from walk](#)

[Download Route Guide](#) (PDF with illustrated Waypoints)

[Download GPX file](#) (GPS Exchange Format)

[Access Walk on OutdoorActive](#)

[Access Walk on OSMaps](#)

[Access Walk on AllTrails](#)

[Access Walk on Wikiloc](#)