

St Abbs Head Nature Reserve

Start and Finish: St Abbs Village

Distance: 4 miles 7km

Walking Time: 2 hours

Info: Toilets, Car Park, Visitor Center, Cafe in St Abbs

Terrain: Steps and Rough Trodden Path. Boots recommended.





St Abbs Head Nature Reserve

People come from far and wide to enjoy the splendours of the National Trust for Scotland's Nature Reserve at St Abbs Head and the property has something to offer everyone all year round.

The coastal scenery is spectacular, the rugged cliffs plunging 90m to the sea affording panoramic views as far as the Isle of May to the north-west, the Farne Islands to the south-east and the Cheviot to the south.

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St Abbs: Toilets, Cafe, Visitor Centre.



Starney Bay

At the very start of the walk is Starney Bay, This area is perhaps most famous for its seabirds where tens of thousands of birds jostle for space on the cliffs at the height of the breeding season. It is truly an awesome experience.

With the varied wildlife the area is a designated a National Nature Reserve, one of only 54 in Scotland, and has designations that reflect its international importance.



Looking over to Kirk Hill/Lighthouse

St Abbs Head also boasts a cultural history dating back some 3000 years. Perhaps the most notable is Kirk Hill where the remains of St Ebba's Chapel and the later St Abbs Kirk make it an extremely important religious site.

There is also evidence in the landscape of a wider influence by man from the rig and furrow of early agriculture, to the lighthouse, to Mire Loch and even the remains of the lost St Abbs and Coldingham golf course.



Lighthouse

The walk up.

A principal light-keeper and two assistants lived in St Abbs's head until it was fully automated in 1993. Light keeping was a remote, lonely and hard existence.

Each keeper at night was required to keep watch in the light-room to ensure that the light flashed correctly to character.

During the day the light-keepers were responsible for keeping the premises tidy, cleaning and painting etc.



St Abbs Head Lighthouse

The lighthouse here is one of over 200 located around Scotland's wild coastline. Operated and maintained by the Northern Lighthouse Board they warn ships of dangerous waters and provide safe passage.

After the sinking of the "Martello" on Carr Rock in 1857 the building of a lighthouse on St Abbs's Head was recommended by the Northern Lighthouse Board. The light was first exhibited on the 24th February 1862.

Standing only 9 metres high but 64 metres above sea level. Designed and built by David and Thomas Stevenson.



Heading West

This downhill section of road leading away from the lighthouse has featured in many drama series and films.

This tarmac section of road will take you back to the Nature Centre at Northfield Farm where there is parking.



Mire Loch

Today Mire Loch is a valued part of St. Abbs Head National Nature Reserve providing a home for freshwater birds such as little grebe, reed bunting, heron, mute swan, moorhen and sedge warbler.

The fringing vegetation which is composed mostly of high reeds provides shelter and food for nesting birds as well as for migrants in spring and autumn.

In early summer hundreds of herring gulls and kittiwakes bathe in the loch.

In recent years the NTS has planted almost 1000 trees around the loch in an effort to provide extra cover for migrant birds.



Traces of the Past

Pettico Wick provided a natural trap for salmon as they swam down the coast. A fishing station operated from 1880-1950. The jetty was built to land supplies for the lighthouse.

On nunnery point you will find an archaeological site once thought to be the site of Abbe's monastery. Protected by a rock ditch and mortared stone wall which can still be seen in places.

Mire Loch was once a bog or mire with rainwater flowing down from the hills on either side. Mire loch was created around 1900 by damming the valley mire.