

RED HAVEN

- Linear coastal walk**
- 5.3km/3.3miles or 2km/1.3miles**
- Allow 1 to 3 hours depending on route**
- Grass and beaten earth path, muddy in places.**
- Moderate**
- Stout shoes or boots recommended**
- OS Explorer 1:25,000 map number 313**

PARKING is available in the Square, in the centre of Auchencairn village, or at a small car park at Old Torr Cottage, if taking the shorter option.

START From the centre of the village take the main road in the direction of Dalbeattie. Turn right down the road to Balcary and straight away you will see the green wooden gate into the Millennium Garden on your left behind the war memorial. Go through the garden, cross the wooden bridge and turn right, following the Auchencairn Burn as it flows out to sea. This part of the walk is named in memory of Hugh Paton, a community-spirited farmer whose family owns the land the path crosses.

At the end of the playing field go through the kissing gate, keep to the right of the field and you will see another gate in the far corner. Through this gate you will see a sign post where you can take a short diversion to visit the first of two lovely bird hides on this walk. Thatched by Castle Douglas thatcher, Jem Cox, the bird hide is ideal for spotting reed buntings. Return to the signpost and continue along the edge of the field and out onto the shoreline. The path meanders along the boundary where the farmland meets the merse and the reed beds. Formerly an important roofing material, reeds cut from here can be seen on a thatched hut in Auchencairn Primary School grounds. In wintertime the fields are home to Barnacle Geese, down from Svalbard in the Arctic to enjoy the rich feeding around the Solway Firth.

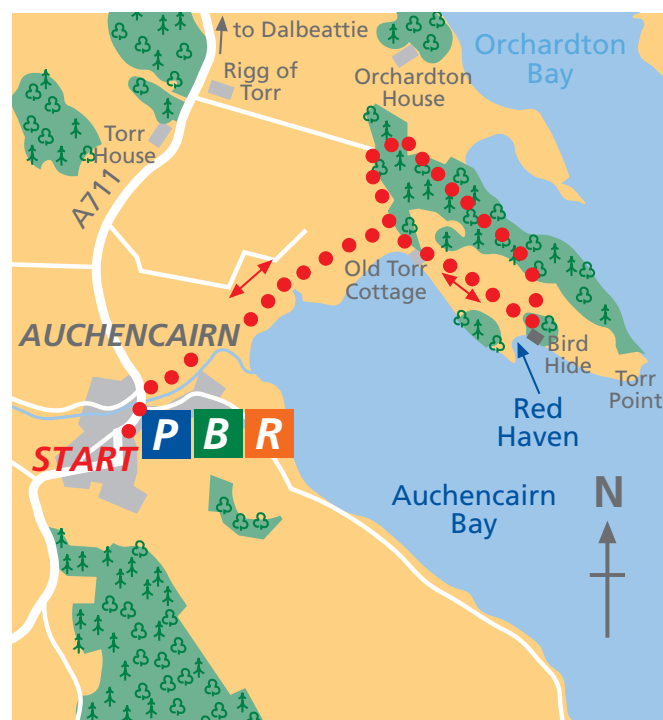
As you approach Old Torr Cottage you will pass through a wooden gate which takes you into the informal car park where the shorter version of this walk starts. Go through the gate, follow the faint track then cross the field to reach the kissing gate in the far corner. This gate leads straight onto Red Haven Bay, known locally as "Reid Ha'en".

Before you cross the field, it is worth mentioning the bird hide, hidden amongst the trees and bushes. To get there, continue along the track, past the beach where you will see a wood up ahead. Cross a stile in the fence here and a short walk takes you to the bird hide. This unusual building was designed and built by an artist formerly resident at the nearby Orchardton House. He enlisted the help of

local schoolchildren to build it and used natural materials, all sourced locally. Straw has been used to fill the walls and whole tree trunks cut up to form the geometrically designed roof. It is well worth a look and, because the hide is set in the woods but also looks out onto the Bay, there is an opportunity to spot a wide range of wildlife, from oystercatchers and cormorants to great tits and woodpeckers. To get to the beach from here simply retrace your steps and cross the field to the kissing gate.

Red Haven is a wonderful, small and secluded bay with fabulous views out to the larger Auchencairn Bay. To your left is Torr Point and Hestan Island is in front of you. Hestan (or Heston as it used to be called) is famous for its connection with S R Crockett's story *The Raiders* in which it is called Rathen Isle. There is a history of smuggling in the area and a great deal of it was going on in the late 18th Century. Nowadays, Hestan is quiet and uninhabited apart from large colonies of nesting gulls, other nesting seabirds and a flock of sheep. In the past, the cottage on the island has had many tenants and used to house the lighthouse keeper. Not far from the cottage, the traces of the workings of a 19th Century copper mine can be seen on the slope above the naturally formed Elephant Rock, so called because of its uncanny resemblance to an elephant.

Having enjoyed your stop at Red Haven, rejoin the path and follow the waymarks up over the spine of Torrs point and down to join the track on the other side. You will have fine views of Orchardton Bay, Screel Hill and the picturesque Colvend coast. Follow the track round to Old Torr cottage and from there retrace your steps back to Auchencairn.



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Leave gates as you find them - Keep dogs under close control at all times - Keep to paths across farmland - Take care on country roads
Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls - Respect farm livestock, crops and machinery - Take your litter home with you
Protect wildlife, plants and trees - Guard against risk of fire - Make no unnecessary noise.