

Bow Fiddle Rock to Sunnyside Beach and Findlater Castle (approx 7 miles)

Terrain – Some short ascents and descents on rocky paths, sand and grass paths

Whether it's landscape carved by nature or buildings made by man, you'll find interesting and unusual structures all around. Fascinating rock formations make this coastal strip a haven for geologists, while grand mansions and castles offer something for those with an interest in more recent history.

This point-to-point walk is on the most western fringe of The Banffshire Coast and starts out at Portknockie. It takes in some unusual geological features, picturesque beaches and the ruinous Findlater Castle.



1.

For this walk, we enter the village of Portknockie to the west of Cullen. The coastal path starts at Addison Street in the top section of Portknockie, and if you are travelling by car you can leave your vehicle here. Take the path down to the shoreline and you will see the unusual feature of the Bow Fiddle Rock. The rock – so named because its arch looks like the bow of a fiddle – stands about 50ft high and is made of quartzite rock.

Although this huge piece of rock dominates the view, take in the smaller features too. During the late summer months the area is heavily clad in heather and is incredibly colourful, while up in the sky and on the cliff faces you may see herring gulls, fulmars, shags and kittiwakes.

2.

Follow the coastal path in an easterly direction towards Cullen. If you have already managed to work up a thirst, don't forget to stop off at Jenny's Well – a natural spring that is found on the hillside. As

you continue along the path you will come to a rocky section and this eventually gives way to a long stretch of golden sand. Be careful of crossing the rocky section at high tide and try and time your walk so that it starts at low tide.

This section of coastline along the west to Stake Ness is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest because of the geology of the area and the habitats – such as coastal grasslands, sand dunes and shingle shores – which support a large variety of wildlife, flora and fauna.

3.

Cullen Bay has long been a favourite day out for both locals and holiday makers. You could very well see bottlenose dolphins and harbour porpoise out in the bay, and sea otters have been known to scurry about on the shore. As you make your way along the beach, you will see an unusual stack of rocks.

These are the Three Kings – a much photographed feature which, legend has it, is the last resting place of three Norse kings who died following a bloody battle nearby. The rockpools surrounding the stacks are always worth exploring for sea urchins, seaweed, crabs and other sea-dwelling beasties.

4.

Walk up the steps at the far end of the beach, past the car park and over the bridge at the Cullen Burn. You are now entering the oldest part of Cullen – the Seatown – and its collection of traditional fishermen's houses. You cannot fail to notice the viaducts which dominate the skyline and if you want to get a closer look, it's possible to access them from a path at the side of Cullen Golf Club.

5.

Continuing on through Seatown, you will pass the Thomas Telford-designed harbour. This was a busy fishing port up until the early 1900s, but now it is home to a fleet of pleasure craft and small creel boats. Continue past the harbour and onto Portlong Road. Just a short distance from here is the Cullen Pet Cemetery. Run by volunteers, it is the last resting place of many much-loved pets.

6.

Follow the path as it snakes its way along the headland, and keep going straight on at the junction. You will then pass through a gate and continue on the path, which will become rockier and narrower, before it descends and rises once again.

7.

A quirky feature of the route is the long flight of steps – the Giant's Steps - that next appear. Incredibly, these were placed here by hand during the 1980s without the aid of heavy lifting gear. Follow the path across to the far side of the bay – take care as some sections inland can be overgrown during the summer months – and at last you have reached the picture-perfect Sunnyside



Beach. On a beautiful summer's day this beach truly does live up to its name! It's an ideal spot to stop and enjoy a picnic from your rucksack or to cool your feet with a paddle in the sea.

8.

After taking in Sunnyside Beach, continue on in an easterly direction. The path will rise up away from the shoreline and once you reach the top, turn left to follow the grassy path between the cliff edge and the fields.

9.

You have reached the ruins of the once majestic Findlater Castle. The origins of the building are said to date back to medieval times, and it's thought that it was occupied for a time by the Vikings. The castle itself is in quite a dangerous condition. Under no circumstances should you try to access the ruins: the site is very unstable and the castle should be viewed from the path.