

## Crovie to Troup Head (approx 5.5 miles)

**Terrain – Some steep climbs on a mixture of tarmac and off-road trails**

The Banffshire Coast may be famed for its seclusion and dramatic natural landscapes, but don't forget to pay a visit to the city while you are here. This is no ordinary city, however, but the incredible seabird city at Troup Head – an RSPB nature reserve which is home to thousands of seabirds.

This route will take you from the charming village of Crovie to the reserve where you will see gannets, puffins, kittiwakes and a whole load of other species of birds which have made this city their home.



### 1.

If you arrive at Crovie by car, leave your vehicle in the car park at the viewpoint overlooking the village. No cars visit Crovie because there are no roads through the village, and only very brave and experienced drivers would dare take their car down the very steep hill to the car park at the bottom!

Turn left out of the car park and follow the road until you reach a flight of steps next to a small burn. Have a stroll around the settlement – said to be one of the greenest in the country because it has no roads – and discover why it is renowned as one of the best preserved fishing villages in Europe. A huge storm in 1953 all but destroyed the village and its harbour and forced families to move to the

relative safety of nearby Gardenstown. Many of the properties in the village are now holiday homes and self-catering accommodation.

## 2.

Return to the flight of steps but instead of climbing up them, move on to the left of the stream and pass by the front of two small cottages. Take a deep breath and start walking up the path on the steep hill, turning left onto a farm track when you reach the top. The track continues to climb as it turns round to the right and just before the house, turn left again – there should be a green arrow pointing the way.

It's worth pausing at this point, not just to catch your breath, but to take in the views across Gamrie Bay and onto Gardenstown, which lies to the west of Crovie. This area is regularly frequented by the resident population of bottlenose dolphins and on a clear day their dorsal fins can be seen popping up above the waves. If you are very lucky, you might even see them leaping clear of the surface as they play.

## 3.

Continue along the track as it heads away from the sea and inland. The path will reach a T-junction at Northfield Farm, at which you will turn left. Troup Head is just a short distance away, as will be seen by the brown RSPB signs. Continue through the farmyard and over the rough track until you reach the official Troup Head car park. Take the right hand track through the gate and follow the line of the fence through the field, keeping the fence on your left.

## 4.

You will reach another gate and by now you should be able to hear the citizens of seabird city going about their day to day business. Keep walking – taking care on the cliffs as these are dangerous and not fenced off – and soon you will see Troup Head in all its glory.

Troup Head is the only mainland gannet colony in Scotland and here you will see thousands of these birds flying in and out of the cliffs, diving into the waters below to catch some lunch – sometimes from as high as 10m above the surface. Adult gannets are large, white birds with black wingtips and are distinctively shaped. Not only do they have long necks, they also have long and pointed beaks, tails and wings. There are thought to be around 1,500 pairs at Troup Head.

Although famed for its gannets, a huge number of other species are seen here throughout the year. Spring is an incredible time to visit as the seabirds start to return to the cliffs after their winter break and the clifftops burst into vivid hues of pink and purple as wildflowers come into bloom.

If Spring is the most colourful time of year, then summer is the noisiest. The cliffs are most heavily populated at this time of year – gannets, puffins, herring gulls, fulmars, guillemots, razorbills and kittiwakes all live happily side by side on the cliff face, while out to sea keep your eyes peeled for shags and, very occasionally, great skua.



In autumn only shags and fulmars stay around, but often they are joined on the land at the top of Troup Head by migrating birds such as thrushes. The cliffs are all but deserted during winter, but you may be able to see gannets returning in January, as well as other visitors such as eider ducks and long-tailed ducks.

## 5.

Continue walking along the cliff top path and instead of turning left at the sign for the car park, keep going straight ahead to find out how you can keep up to date with the goings on at Troup Head while visiting the Macduff Marine Aquarium. CCTV cameras have been set up just below the signed viewpoint, and these beam live pictures back to the aquarium 15 miles away.

It's worth noting that the 9km stretch of cliffs from Troup Head as far as Lion's Heads in the east is designated a Special Protection Area due to the large colonies of breeding seabirds that it supports. It overlaps with a Site of Special Scientific Interest which covers the marine environment offshore.

When you can finally bring yourself to leave Troup Head, turn back to the signpost for the car park, and then follow the same route that you came on to arrive back at Crovie.

## 6.

If you have enjoyed getting to see the birdlife on The Banffshire Coast, you may want to consider visiting Loch of Strathbeg, another RSPB reserve which is about 15 miles away near Fraserburgh. Species that can be seen here include lapwings, common terns, pink-footed geese and whooper swans, as well as a white tipped sea eagle which is affectionately known as Red A.