

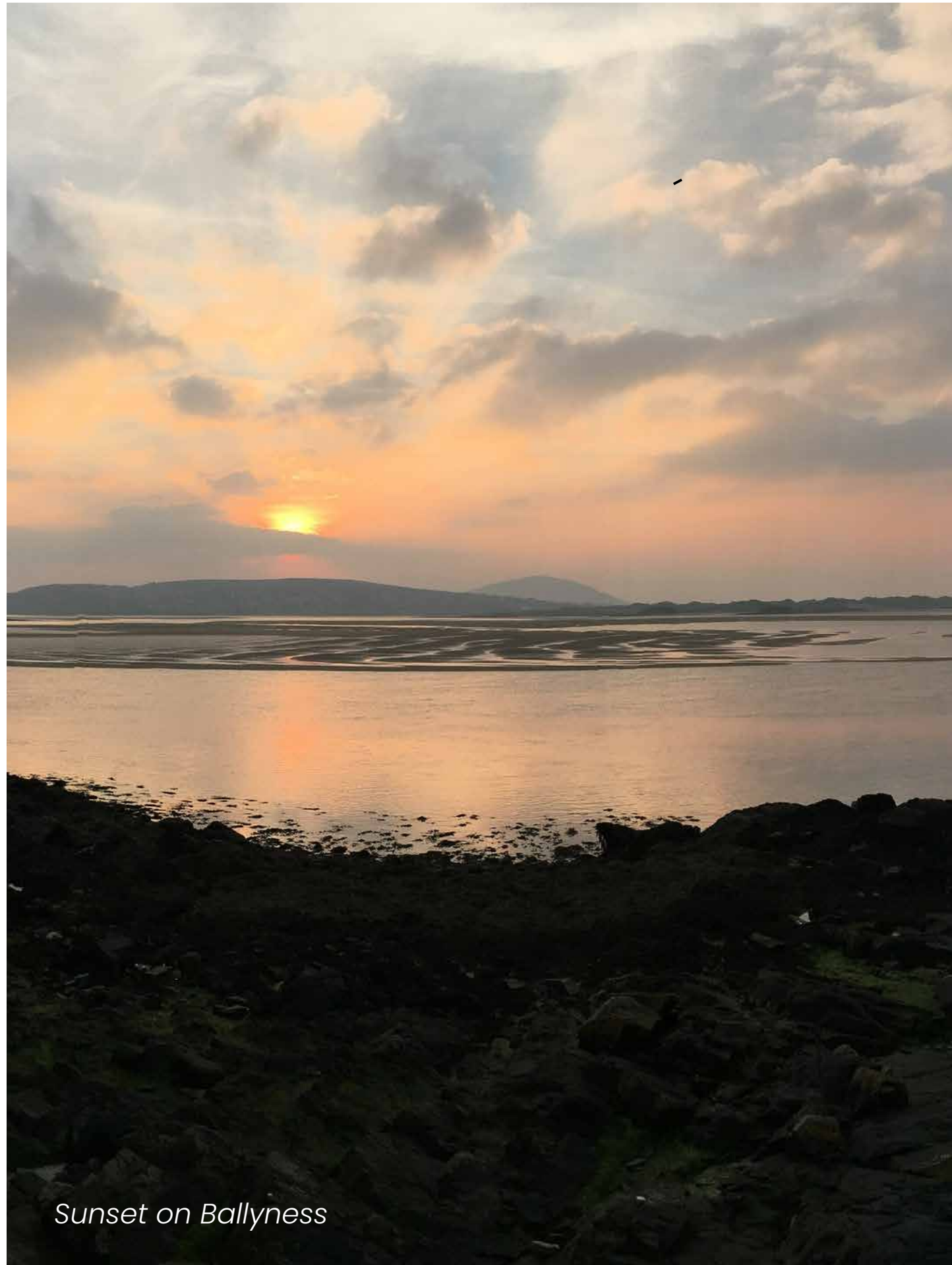
**Ballyness Way
Walking Guide**

**Bealach Bhaile an Easa
Eolaí**



2019

www.falcarragh.ie



Sunset on Ballyness

Ballyness Way

Bealach Bhaile an Easa

Réitithe ag Coiste Glan agus Glas agus Cósta Glan agus Glas
An Fhál Carraigh
Falcarragh Tidy Towns Committee and Clean Coast Committee
An Fál Carrach, Co Dhún na nGall



This is a short but spectacular beach walk on the Wild Atlantic Way coastal route at Falcarragh, County Donegal. The walking route presents breath-taking views to Tory Island and Horn Head with spectacular seascapes both winter and summer. This guide offers some information on the route, mainly in relation to local heritage and wildlife, that we hope will add to your enjoyment. It is divided into four short sections: Heritage; Ballyness Bay; The Dunes; Drumnatinny Beach. Links to other sites of interest are also included.

The walk is about 4km to 4.5km long from Killult Pier to the car park at Drumnatinny Beach. It is entirely along the coast and so is level and suitable for young and old. Access is easy and you can start at either end, the pier or the car park, both with parking available. A car may be left at the end of the walk in advance for return, or you can walk back along the road (3.5km) if you want to take an alternative route back. This guide is laid out starting at the pier.

What wildlife may be seen depends on the season and the weather, and the plumage of birds and the plants in flower will change. The examples and images provided are simply an aid to identification and to give a flavour of the unique and rich natural heritage of Ballyness which has been declared a site of European importance and designated as a Special Area of Conservation.



Brent Goose
by Ewan Berry (Local Artist - Falcarragh)

Ballyness is in the parish of Cloughaneely which lies between the Derryveagh mountains and the North Atlantic coast. It has a rich cultural heritage stretching back to its earliest inhabitants, the Formorians, the Milesians, the Tuatha Dé Danann and the Celts. The ancient Celtic language, Gaelic, is still spoken by the present day local inhabitants.

One of the mythical inhabitants of the area was Lugh, the God of Light. He had a forge in Drumnatinny beside this pier and his father Mac Aneely gave his name to the parish. Lugh's mother was Eithne, the daughter of the infamous Balor of-the-poison-eye who reigned in Tory. Lugh eventually killed his grandfather Balor and Lugh's sword of light was represented on the first stamps issued by Éire, the Irish Free State.

It was those first people who sailed into Ballyness five thousand years ago who built the mighty Wedge Tombs, Court Cairns and Dolmen that we see today at Ray, Ardsbeg, Keeldrum, Killult and Tory. These tombs were aligned with the sun to mark the four great seasonal festivals, Imbolg (spring), Bealtaine (summer), Lughnasa (autumn) and Samhain (winter). They also built fortifications and places of refuge such as Ring Forts, Rathes, Crannogs and Souterrains that are scattered throughout the parish. Indeed the fort of their war goddess Badbh is a mere 2km from here at what is now known as the Bawaan Pool at the mouth of the Tullaghobegley River. The Olphert gold hoard of brooches, pins and amulets uncovered in the sand dunes after a storm shows that they were skilled artists and metal workers.

The pier itself was built in 1848 as a famine relief scheme, workers being paid three pence a day along with a bowl of broth. During the famine two 'soup kitchens' operated in Falcarragh and hundreds left the parish across Droichead na nDeor (The Bridge of Tears) through Muckish Gap seeking a better life in Australia or America.

Bog ore and herring were exported from the pier in the past and coal and timber were imported. However passage in and out of the Bay was dangerous. In 1879 the Enterprise carrying ore foundered on a sand bar.

The sea you look on from the pier has witnessed many tragic events. Wolfe Tone's ship the Hoche was captured here after a six hour battle with British frigates. The Wasp, sailing to Inishtrahull with soldiers and bailiffs to collect rents, foundered off Tory and fifty were lost, some of whom are buried at St Ann's Church, Killult. On the 7th December 1940, the Stolwick sailing between Inishdooey and Inishbeg struck rocks and sank. Just west of Tory, the Empress of Britain, the largest liner lost in World War 2, was torpedoed by U-Boat U32.

During World War 2 convoys from America were often attacked by U-Boats in these offshore waters, and afterwards the strand would be littered with timber, sides of bacon and bags of flour.

Today the pier is used mostly for recreation. It is a good vantage point to view the birds and animals of the Bay, many of which are described below. The history of the parish is written in its beautiful placenames. The meanings of many of the names can be found at <https://www.logainm.ie>.

The following sections briefly describe the main areas of your walk - the Bay, the Dunes and the Beach and what you may see.



Mouth of Ballyness Bay

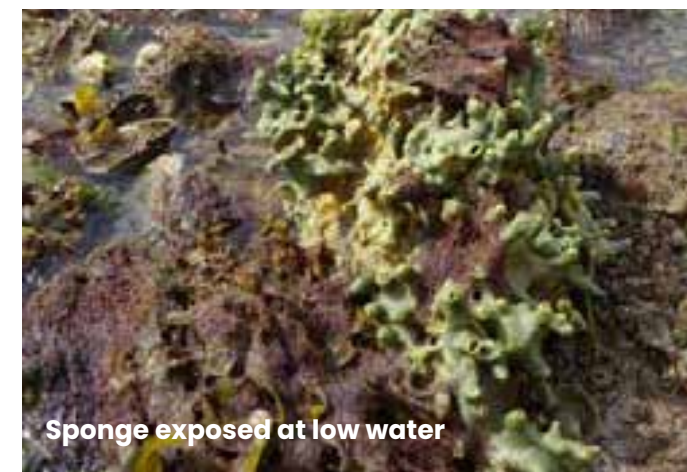


Common seals in the Bay

Ballyness Bay is a large inlet hemmed in by Dooley sand spit to the west and by the Drumnatinnny dune system to the east. Tory Island can be seen through the mouth of the bay seven miles out at sea. Extensive sand flats are exposed in the bay at low tide and rocky shores occur in the inner part of the bay. The area is host to a great variety of animals and plants and attracts many species of birds and larger predators to the rich feeding.

A number of rivers and streams flow into the bay including Owenwillin, Owentully, Glenna, and the Tullaghobegley. At low tide the river channels are seen as ribbons of dark water stained brown by the bogs in their mountain catchments. A number of them still support runs of wild Atlantic Salmon, and in the past salmon were commercially fished at the pier using draft nets.

Sand eels are abundant in the bay and they were traditionally harvested in the summer from the soft sands at low tide. They are a favourite food of the resident sea trout population and birds such as cormorants, shags, red-breasted mergansers and sandwich terns. Common seals are regularly seen from the pier hauled out at low tide on the sand bars.



Sponge exposed at low water



Periwinkles



Salmon Leaping - Tullaghobegley



Sea Trout

Ballyness Bay supports over 40 different species of wader, wildfowl, seabird and birds of prey. Two uncommon diving birds can be seen on the waters of the bay. The Great Northern Diver is a winter visitor here and is known as the Loon in North America when in summer breeding plumage. The Red-throated Diver is also a winter visitor but Donegal also has a small rare breeding population. Some of the other waterfowl and waders that can be seen in the bay are pictured below.

In the surrounding fields you may also spot Choughs, a bird that is restricted to the western fringes of Europe. The Buzzard, a bird of prey that has expanded in Ireland in recent years, is also a regular hunter around these shores, often perching on fence posts or electricity poles.



Red-throated Diver



Great Northern Diver



Red-beasted Merganser



Shelduck



Wigeon



Eider Duck



Barnacle Goose



Greenland White-fronted Goose



Pale Bellied Brent Goose

The Bay

Ballyness Way



Great Black-backed Gull



Bar-tailed Godwit



Sandwich Tern



Golden Plover



Redshank



Sanderling



Greenshank



Oyster Catcher



Lapwing



Chough



Turnstone



Buzzard



Black-headed Gull



Grey Plover



Otter



Lugworm Casts



Curlew



Ringed Plover



Dunlin



Corncrake

If you are lucky and observant you may spot otters foraging amongst the sea wrack to the south of the pier.

As you cross the strand from the pier to the dunes notice the thousands of small curly mounds of sand. These are the casts of lugworms as they burrow into the sand. Beside each mound is a hollow like a navel. This is the head end of the lug worm tube. Lugworms are large marine worms that are often used as bait by sea anglers.



From the mouth of the bay a long ridge of dunes stretches east for 3km to the end of the route at the Ray River. The highest dunes line the back of the beach and act as a defense against stormy seas.

Not many plants can live in this extreme environment with high levels of sea salt and constantly drifting sharp sand. These high shifting dunes are known as white dunes and are dominated by Marram Grass which is well adapted to the conditions with its needle like leaves that curl in as protection against the drying winds, and with deep wiry roots. The Marram Grass traps the moving sands, binds it with its strong roots and builds tall dunes.

Other plants that grow in the sand patches amongst the Marram include the bright yellow Ragwort, aromatic Thyme, Sea Spurge with its milky white toxic sap, Sea Sandwort with its fleshy neatly arranged leaves, the prickly Sea Holly and Creeping Thistle.



Creeping Thistle



Sea Holly



Ragwort



Sea Spurge



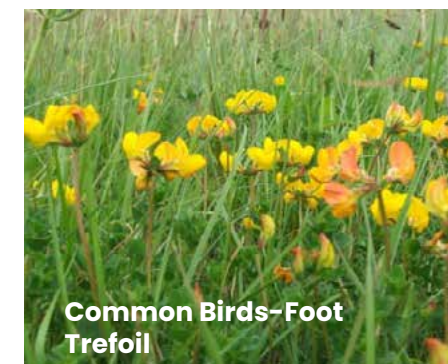
Thyme



Sea Sandwort



Sea Rocket



Common Birds-Foot Trefoil



Pyramidal Orchid



Cat's Ear



Harebell



Coltsfoot

The Dunes

Ballyness Way



Inland from the white dunes are the sheltered fixed dunes, and dune hollows with wet areas. The fixed dunes support grassland with a rich variety of herbs.

The beautiful Pyramidal Orchid grows profusely here and can be seen in flower from June to August. Lady's Bedstraw is common and produces small, but fragrant yellow flowers. Plants with large showy flowers include the Harebell with its powdery blue bells on delicate stems, the Sand Pansy which in its European distribution is particularly abundant in Ireland, and the lacey white umbels of Wild Carrot usually with a small cluster of red flowers at the centre of the umbel.

In the damper hollows you may find Water Mint with its unmistakable scent when crushed. Devil's Bit Scabious, the main foodplant of the caterpillar of the rare Marsh Fritillary butterfly, also grows here. The Grass-of-parnassus with its delicate white solitary flower and heart shaped leaves is easily identified. There are many other beautiful flowers to find among the dunes and some of them are shown below.

The skylark can be heard 50 to 100m overhead in spring and summer as it delivers a warbling song that may last half an hour. The wet dune hollows provide feeding habitat for Greenland White-fronted Geese and Barnacle Geese, and many waders and wildfowl roost in this area and often seek refuge from wild storms and gales here.

The Irish Hare, a species of mountain hare unique to Ireland, lives among the dunes. Unlike its European cousins the Irish Mountain Hare does not grow a white coat in winter. The hare is much larger than the rabbit which also occurs abundantly in the dunes. Unlike the rabbit which burrows into the dunes, the hare lives entirely above ground.





In front of the dunes is the wide expanse of Drumnatinny's beautiful white beach. From the beach there are panoramic views. Inishbofin, Inishdoeey, Inishbeg and Tory islands lie to the northwest and to the northeast can be seen the towering cliffs of Horn Head.



Whales and dolphins are occasionally spotted off the beach. In 2014 a pod of pilot whales beached here and while many were re-floated through the efforts of locals, tragically a number died. Bottle nosed dolphins also pass the beach.



Out beyond the breakers rafts of Common Scoter ducks feed on shellfish in the shallow waters. If you walk the beach between September and April you may spot Sanderlings rushing in and out at the waves edge like little clockwork toys as they feed on small animals. Another beach resident is the Ringed Plover which breeds on suitable sandy or shingle areas of the beach.

As you near the Ray River at the eastern end of the beach you may see flocks of birds at the river mouth. Common Gulls, Herring Gulls, Great Black-backed Gulls, and Kittiwakes enjoy a bath and drink the freshwater. Grey seals occasionally patrol the river mouth when salmon are running. In the river you can spot small flounder skimming over the stones and a little further upstream you may see sea trout leaping in the pools.

As you approach the car park from May to August listen for the iconic call of the Corncrake, a shy, secretive bird that is now threatened with global extinction and only present in small numbers at a few locations in Ireland. The lush wet meadows along the river provide the habitat it needs.

The description above covers only a small portion of the wonders to be seen in the parish of Cloughaneely. Some information is also available on the information boards at each end of the route and detailed additional information can be found on the subjects covered at the sites below:

BIRDS
<https://www.birdwatchireland.ie>

FLOWERS
<http://www.irishwildflowers.ie/>
<http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/>

WHALES AND DOLPHINS
<https://www.iwdg.ie/>

BALLYNESS BAY SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION
<https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/001090>

Acknowledgments

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BIRDS
Wigeon, Laitche, CC: Eider, Magnus Hagdorn: Sandwich Tern, Ken Billington: Greenshank, Zeynel Cebeci: Greenland white-fronted goose, John B.: Great Northern Diver, Berichard: Red-throated diver, Ómar Runólfsson: Sanderling, Jean-Jacques Boujot: Dunlin, Zeynel Cebeci: Turnstone, Donald Macauley: Oystercatcher, Richard Bartz: Grey plover, Frank Schulenburg: Golden plover, Wouter van der Ham: Lapwing, Andreas Trepte: Curlew, Redshank, Greenshank, Dr. Raju Kasambe: Bartailed godwit, Ian Kirk: Kittiwake, Andreas Trepte: Sandwich, MPF: Black headed gull, Arild Vågen: Red breasted merganser, Ron Knight: Corncrake, Rachel Davies: Buzzard, Jacob Spinks: Brent Goose, MPF: Greenland white-fronted goose, John B.: Barnacle goose, Dr. Raju Kasambe: Great black backed gull, Ringed Plover, Arnstein Rønning: Bar-tailed godwit, JJ Harrison: Golden plover, Kev Chapman:

PLANTS
Harebell, Isidre blanc: Sea Spurge, Eirian Evans: Sea bindweed, David Ouahnich: Thyme, Lis Burke: Sea rocket cakile, Krzysztof Ziarnik: Cats ear, Eclipse2009: Ladys bedstraw, Phil Sellens: Marram, Jerzy Opiota: Grass of Parnassus, Rasbak: Devil's bit scabious, Anne Burgess: Mouse-ear Hawkweed, Udo Schmidt

ANIMALS
Irish Hare, Alan Wolfe: Otter, Bernard Landgraf



BALLYNESSWAY