

3.3 Cockburnspath to St Abbs

44 47 49 53

Distance 13.6 miles 21.9 km

Terrain mainly grassy paths with farm tracks and some minor road; many gates and stiles will slow you down

Grade undulating slopes, steep in places

Food and drink Cockburnspath (shop), St Abbs

Side-trip Farm castle (from Dowlaw Farm)

Summary mostly coastal with some inland detours, leading to the grandeur of St Abb's headland, lighthouse and nature reserve



Follow signs for the Southern Upland Way (SUW) for the first 2.4 miles (3.8 km), then follow the blue circular logo for the Berwickshire Coastal Path (BCP).



- After Cockburnspath Parish Church, return to The Square and turn right along Hoprig Road. After 170 m reach the junction with Edinburgh Road, with a war memorial across the road and a Southern Upland Way information board on the right.
- Make a left-right dogleg, following the Edinburgh Road for just 70 m before turning right on the informal farm road (sign may be obscured).
- Follow this round to the left and after 400 m pass under the A1. Now make a right-left dogleg to pass under the railway line following the thistle-in-hexagon logo ①.
- Within 230 m, reach a junction and cross the road in a left-right dogleg to a grassy lane with the first BCP sign ②. Descend it for 600 m to the coast. Views to the north include Torness and the Bass Rock.
- Turn right to follow the coastline as signed for 1.6 km, at first on a clifftop path with a view of Cove Harbour, then on a mixture of field-edge and clifftop paths.



North-west over Pease Bay



Cove Harbour

James Hutton



James Hutton (1726-97) was an Enlightenment polymath and the father of modern geology. He discovered Unconformities – sharp junctions between rocks from different eras – providing evidence to support his theory that the earth was millions of years old.

In 1787 he reported Unconformities on the Isle of Arran and near Jedburgh, and in 1788 he found another at Siccar Point, which he viewed by boat. At Siccar Point, horizontal red sandstone lies over nearly vertical folds in very old greywacke, suggesting a 65 million year gap between the two. To visit, take the signed path at mile 29.7 – about 1.8 km round trip.

- After a flight of steps down to a burn, climb to a kissing-gate and reach a tarmac road.
- Turn left down the road towards Pease Bay Leisure Park. At the bottom of the hill ignore the Southern Upland Way that turns off inland: keep ahead on the road.
- Cross a forded stream by a footbridge, and continue uphill. After 250 m on the road, take the path on the left that soon climbs steeply by steps to regain the clifftop.
- Follow BCP signs as the path takes you around the clifftop, after about 800 m turning inland to reach a tarmac road.



- Turn left along the road to reach the entrance to the Siccar Point walk, with info board and parking area: see the panel on page 47.
- Just afterwards, at a fingerpost (mile 29.6) bear right off the road, heading up a rough track that climbs steeply. Follow the track uphill, bearing left as signed on a vague path leading to a gate.
- Turn right towards the buildings and follow a field-edge path to reach another tarmac road at mile 29.9.
- Turn left along the narrow road with fine hawthorn hedgerows for 1.9 km to pass through Redheugh Farm.
- After the farmyard, go through a gate and pass a duck pond on your right. Follow the farm road for a further 250 m where you turn right off it, just before a water course.
- Keep the water course on your left as you climb. Do not cross until after a kissing-gate and a further climb to a clump of oak trees. Here a fingerpost sends you across to its far side, still climbing on a field-edge path.
- After about 800 m of climbing, turn left at mile 31.6 along field-edge paths punctuated by kissing-gates for a further 800 m. Turn right at mile 32.2 towards a comms mast (on the far side of Dowlaw Road) but before the road, turn left on a field-edge path for nearly 200 m to a waymarker.

North-west over the coast, Tonness distant

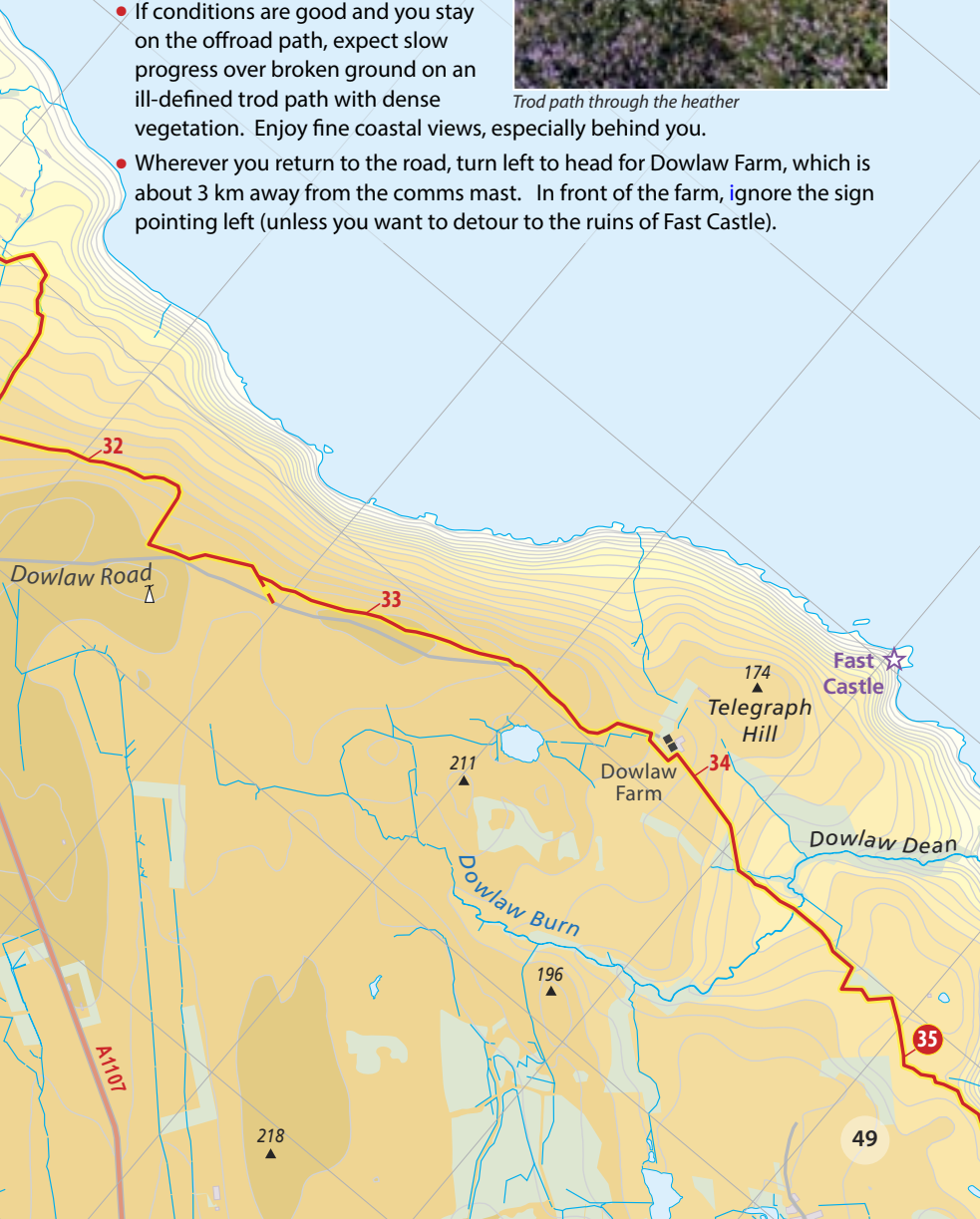


- At this point the BCP points straight ahead, but here, or at the next waymarker (mile 32.6), you could instead bear right to pick up the narrow, quiet road for quicker walking. As of late 2020 the path was very overgrown, barely visible in places and devoid of waymarkers. In poor visibility the road may be a better choice. The height of this section (215 m) makes it prone to sea fog.



Trod path through the heather

- If conditions are good and you stay on the offroad path, expect slow progress over broken ground on an ill-defined trod path with dense vegetation. Enjoy fine coastal views, especially behind you.
- Wherever you return to the road, turn left to head for Dowlaw Farm, which is about 3 km away from the comms mast. In front of the farm, ignore the sign pointing left (unless you want to detour to the ruins of Fast Castle).



- The fingerpost promises St Abbs in 6¼ miles and sends you through a small gate on the right. The path leads through a small wood, bypassing the farm buildings.
- Emerging from the wood, follow signs taking you generally eastward for about 2 km of field-edge paths. Within 900 m you descend to cross Dowlaw Burn by a concrete footbridge, with a fine old stone bridge up to your left.
- Over the next 1.3 km there's a slight climb and a number of bends around field corners before you descend to the coastal clifftop at Rough Heugh.
- The route now stays close to the clifftop for the next 3 miles/5 km with frequent BCP signs to guide you through gates and over stiles. There are grand views over the coast behind you, to your left, and soon also ahead, where St Abb's headland comes into view.
- After about 1.8 km, you approach a major obstacle: the deep ravine of Westerside Dean (mile 36.2). Drop down to the corner of a field and follow the fingerpost★ that sends you through a gate. The path descends unexpectedly towards a headland, dropping steeply in places.



Stone bridge over Dowlaw Burn



Footbridge over the Moor Burn

Fingerpost at field corner



- Your goal soon becomes obvious: a timber footbridge provides the only way to cross the Moor Burn. On its far side, climb the trod path and turn right beside a stone wall for about 100 m.
- Then turn left to start the long, steep climb back to clifftop level. You gain 90 m of altitude over 250 m of rough ground.
- After the main climb, make a right-left dogleg as signed and, still climbing, pick your way among or around some dense gorse, soon gaining views of Coldingham Loch ahead.
- Descend to the stile and footbridge over its outflow burn, climbing again afterwards. Head towards the lower of a second pair of Admiralty distance poles in a field. It's worth looking behind you from time to time for views over the cliffs.
- Skirt the field corner and continue ahead, with ever improving views of the headland. The trail now makes a long descent all the way to 25 m above sea level, crossing some wall stiles on the way down.
- At a fingerpost in the bottom corner you meet the tarmac access road in St Abb's Head National Nature Reserve.
- Turn left along the road that snakes its way up towards the headland, with grand views over the historic tiny harbour of Pettico Wick to your left: see photo on pp4-5. Soon you see over Mire Loch, the manmade loch that appears on our front cover.



West from Pettico Wick



Ladder stile on the descent



Road snaking up to St Abb's Head

- On a clear day, the views behind you (north-west) include Torness and, to its right Barns Ness lighthouse with the Fife peninsula beyond. The photo below shows Fife's summit over 40 miles away – West Lomond (522 m) – aligned with Barns Ness.

View north-west to Fife



- After 650 m the road ends at the famous St Abb's Lighthouse, unusual in that it's reached by a downward flight of steps: see page 22. It has protected that headland since 1862 and its light was automated in 1993.
- Take the steep path up behind the lighthouse to pick up a path signed as the Lighthouse Loop. It passes some dramatic coves before heading slightly inland to climb the shoulder of Kirk Hill: this is where St Ebba founded her church: see page 16.
- Descending to the coast at Horsecastle Bay and enjoy another 1 km of superb coastal scenery before you reach a picnic area where the path turns right inland (now suited to 'All Abilities') to reach the B6438 public road within 300 m.
- Cross over and turn left (at first on a roadside footpath) to descend into St Abbs past the gateway to Northfield House: see page 16. It belonged to Andrew Usher (1826-1898) who generously restored the harbour in 1890. Soon you reach the Visitor Centre on the left where you can learn more about the village and Usher: see the panel opposite.



North-east to the first headland



Coastal scenery near mile 39

St Abb's Lighthouse with foghorn beneath





35

Rough Heugh

Lumsdaine

Cross
Law

Moor Burn

163

Westerside
Dean

36

Coldingham
Loch

37

Pettico
Wick

St Abbs
Head NNR

38

St Abbs Lighthouse

Kirk Hill
79

Mire
Loch

Horsecastle
Bay

39

Northfield
House

B6438

Creel Road

40

St Abbs
Visitor Centre

St Abbs

Coldingham
Bay

Mildown Burn

Coldingham
Priory

41

Coldingham

42

B6438

A1107



Cliffs near mile 37.5



St Abbs Visitor Centre

The route visits this centre on its way into St Abbs. Displays feature Andrew Usher (1826-98), who created Scotch whisky as an export trade. He made his holiday home at Northfield House (see page 16) and he generously funded several village buildings, including the harbour wall extension in 1890.

Usher also rationalised various spellings of St Abbs (formerly known as Coldingham Harbour). The centre has displays on the lifeboat tradition, geology, wildlife and St Ebba. Admission is free, with a gift shop and a supply of good leaflets. Its normal season is Easter to late October, open daily from 10.00 to 17.00: www.stabbsvisitorcentre.co.uk