

# WALK

## 1. Car Park

Park your car at the car park next to the cemetery. The car park sits on wind blown sand and the top of the hill is an excellent vantage point for looking up the strath and along Strathy Point. Looking along the west side of the river mouth you should be able to pick out the raised beach that represents the rise of the land after last ice age.

## 2. Riverbank

Walking down to the river bank you would have noticed Northern Downy Rose, Germander's Speedwell, Cowslips and Dandelions. At the riverbank trees such as Common Alder and Rowan are mixed with Primrose and Pink Purslane (not native). Looking around you might spot Curlews and Oyster Catchers.

## 3. Machair

Walk a little way along the riverbank and then turn inland to the dune system. You might notice Bluebells, Wild Hyacinth, Germander's Speedwell, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Northern Marsh Orchid and Wild Thyme. Rabbits are the predominant fauna but a variety of insects (eg beetles and dragonflies) can also be spotted.

## 4. Beach and Cliffs

Walk along the beach to the cliffs at the east end of the beach. The sand is a quartz dominated sand and dependent on the prevalent weather conditions small lagoons may have formed. Within the lagoons the sand may form ripple shapes, these exact shapes may also be seen in the cliffs. Looking seaward you may spot seals and other sea mammals. Overhead are terns, skuas, curlews and oyster catchers amongst many other birds. The cliffs represent the limey deposits laid down in a vast lake during the Devonian geological period (DATES). Within the rocks you might be able to see cross sections of ripples, algal formation and other structures that can be seen on today's beach. A break in the rock (called a joint) connects several geos and caves. Dependent on the tides you might try to find Captain Ivory's Cave; a large, two-roomed cave in which the captain of a smuggling lugger lived for almost a year. Along the cliff-line where the sheep are unable to reach you may spot the rare Purple Oxytropis (*Oxytropis halleri*). Roseroot can also be found. The horizontal lines in the grass are not sheep tracks but points at which the soil is sliding away from the rock.

## 5. Cliff top

Again admire the scene from the top of the cliffs. Keeping an eye above for the Buzzards looking for prey. Along the top of the cliff are Cowslips, blue Spring Squill and toadstools. The layout of the fields behind you date from the period

of the Highland Clearances and were assigned to each family. Walk along the cliff top taking care.

#### 6. Dun Mhairtein

Taking care around the cliff top examine the remains of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC fort. Return to join the end of the road at Baligill.

#### 7. Baligill

At this point note the remains of one of several lime kilns in Baligill. Lime was sourced from the rocks and was used to try and improve the soil. One the small cliff face on either side at the limekiln in the rock face there is a small band of fossil bearing strata. These have borne fossil fish from the Devonian period.

#### 8. Peat Bog

Follow the gorse (locally called whin) lined road and view the typical peat bog with bog cotton, heather and sphagnum moss. At the main road turn right past the two road stone quarries and Golden Scaly Fern covered slopes.

#### 9. Strathy

Walk past the two churches and continue past the gorse and foxgloved covered slopes. Pass the roadside well (NC 84111 65019) and carry on to the bridge. Just before the bridge, cut down to the right to a gate which leads to the river bank. Walk along the riverbank looking for the yellow-white flowers of the Lesser Butterfly Orchid and Marsh Marigold.

#### Return

Pass the farmhouse and cross a small wooden bridge, follow the path to the car park. Take your car to the Strathy Inn for a well deserved cup of tea and sandwich or other light refreshment.

### A Friendly Request

The beach area at Strathy has been made into a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in recognition of its flora. Alongside the fact that it is illegal in Scotland to pick or dig-up wild flowers this offers our area a special status. Please respect the environment, only take photos and only leave behind footprints.

Take care with dogs, tides and cliff tops as we cannot take any responsibility for events happening while you are out enjoying the walk.

Thanks to Ken Butler from the Caithness Field Club for allowing us to use his guided walk as a basis for this one.

