

## The Whithorn Way – A brief introduction

The development of the Whithorn Way long distance walking route is the latest chapter in an ancient story.

It is now over 1,500 years since the shrine of St Ninian, a Roman missionary bishop who evangelised the southern Picts, first became a centre of pilgrimage in the Isle of Whithorn, making this the cradle of Christianity in Scotland. Nearly a thousand years later, Whithorn reached the height of its popularity when large numbers of pilgrims – following the royal examples set by Robert the Bruce and James IV - visited the huge medieval cathedral annually. With the banning of pilgrimages in the wake of the Scottish Reformation in 1560, the cathedral was dismantled almost entirely, the town and area went into decline and Whithorn's ancient status was largely forgotten, the memory of its greatness considerably eclipsed by the popular fame of Iona and St Columba.

The current 21<sup>st</sup> century revival of off-road pilgrimage travel across Europe provides a new opportunity for people of all religions and backgrounds to celebrate Whithorn's remarkable history and to undertake a new type of journey as part of a growing faith tourism movement. As recent research has shown, we can trace the medieval pilgrim routes and related sites by noting which abbeys and chapels offered hospitality and opportunities for worship along the way, and by identifying the holy wells and sites that pilgrims visited when travelling south from Glasgow and Paisley. Historically, pilgrimage to Whithorn, as elsewhere, fulfilled a key spiritual need through opportunities for worship, cures for diseases, and the outward expression of piety and penance. The modern pilgrim seeks parallel, but different and no less important, qualities of experience by walking in the footsteps of the saints, monks and monarchs of long ago.

## A Modern Day Pilgrimage - its development

Modern walking routes offer key challenges to pilgrims, but in recent years new feasibility studies led by the Ayrshire Pilgrims Trail and the popular success of the Paisley Abbey 850 pilgrimage walks



have identified the opportunity to create a new Whithorn Way long distance path that will in large measure follow the

footprint of much older routes. Similarly, the recent archaeological and historical work of the Whithorn Trust has highlighted scope to expand the appeal of the town and its environs as a pilgrimage destination.

Work to publicise the Way and establish its infrastructure as a popular walking route is the key objective of the Whithorn Way steering group, which is led by the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum, a network of organisations and individuals committed to the development of off-road pilgrimage travel.

During 2015 we plan to have sufficient information and support on the Whithorn Way Website to allow individuals and small groups to experience this walk. At the same time the Steering Group is working to improve some sections of the Way to take them off road and to work with communities along the trail in the development of information and services for the pilgrim walker. The long term aim is to have this walk waymarked and classified as one of Scotland's Great Trails.

The Steering Group's plans have the support of National and Local Government and concur with our objective of bringing larger numbers of walkers to the area thereby enabling rural regeneration.

For more information on the Whithorn Way and the Steering Group activity visit

[www.whithornway.org](http://www.whithornway.org)

# The Whithorn Way



*Glasgow to Whithorn*

*A Pilgrimage walk of  
127 miles*

*In the footsteps of  
Saints, Monks and Monarchs*

## The Whithorn Way – Route description

The Way is best split into 12 walking sections varying in length between 9 and 15 miles.

A further walking day to allow pilgrims to visit St Ninian's Cave and the Isle of Whithorn is encouraged.

- 1 Glasgow Cathedral to Paisley Abbey (13½ miles)
- 2 Paisley Abbey to Lochwinnoch (10 miles)
- 3 Lochwinnoch to Kilwinning (13 miles)
- 4 Kilwinning to Troon (12 miles)
- 5 Troon to Ayr (9½ miles)
- 6 Ayr to Maybole via Dunure (13 miles)
- 7 Maybole to Girvan (12 miles)
- 8 Girvan to Colmonell (13 miles)
- 9 Colmonell to Barrhill via Pinwherry (10 miles)
- 10 Barrhill to New Luce (13 miles)
- 11 New Luce to Mochrum (15 miles)
- 12 Mochrum to Whithorn (9 miles)

The distances are approximate and may vary slightly from that shown.

For route directions and more detailed information on distances visit the website.



Glasgow

Crossraguel

Whithorn

## Additional Information

This leaflet is only meant to be an introduction to the Whithorn Way, the work of the Whithorn Way Steering Group and the involvement of the Scottish Pilgrim Routes Forum (SPRF).

For fuller details on SPRF visit [www.sprf.org.uk](http://www.sprf.org.uk)  
For up to date & fuller details regarding the Way

[www.whithornway.org](http://www.whithornway.org)

## The Route Map

This map is only produced to show the general line of the Way and the key places it passes. It is not meant to be or adequate for navigation while walking.



The Map has been provided by David Langworth (Cartographer) – Member of the Steering Group.

## The Whithorn Way – Places of Interest

The Way has many places and buildings of significance to stop and visit thereby enhancing the pilgrimage experience.

- 1 Glasgow & St Andrew's Cathedrals, Old Govan Parish Church with Sarcophagus, and Renfrew Castle
- 2 Paisley Abbey, Celtic Barochan Cross, St Mirin's Cathedral, and Castle Semple Collegiate Church
- 3 Kilbirnie Auld Kirk, and Kilwinning Abbey
- 4 Garnock Flood Plain Nature Reserve, Scottish Maritime Museum, and Fullerton Parish Church Irvine
- 5 Prestwick Salt Pan Houses, Bruce's Well and Lazar House, Crosbie Church, St Nicholas 11<sup>th</sup> Century Church, and Troon Portland Church
- 6 St Leonard's Church, Brig o' Doon & Old Alloway Kirk, Dunure Harbour, Castle & Village and Carrick Centre.
- 7 Crossraguel Abbey, Kirkoswald Old Church, and Souter Johnnie's Cottage
- 8 Girvan Stumpy Tower (Town Jail), South Church Girvan.
- 9 St Colmon Parish Church - Colmonell, and Pinwherry Castle
- 10 Martyr's Tomb, New Luce conservation village - church and ancient church yard
- 11 Glenluce Abbey, and Auchenalg Standing Stones
- 12 Drumtroddan Standing Stones, and Whithorn with Northumbrian Monastery & Medieval Cathedral

While in Whithorn spend another day to visit the Whithorn Trust Visitor Centre and walk out to St Ninian's Cave and the Isle of Whithorn.

## Contacting the Steering Group

All Steering Group members can be found on the Whithorn Way website. Initial contact should be by e-mail to [info@walkingsupport.co.uk](mailto:info@walkingsupport.co.uk) or telephone **01896 822079**