

# PIPPA AND BEN'S HIGHLAND WALKS



**FORSS HOUSE**  
HOTEL

## CHIHUAHUA STROLL

Website: [Crosskirk and St. Mary's Church](#)

Distance - 3 miles

Duration - 1 hour

Difficulty - Easy

Crosskirk is a small hamlet, mostly of agricultural and coastal land, around 6 miles west of Thurso in Caithness. The area has historical connections with a lost broch, and St Mary's Church and burial ground, the Chapel dates back to the 12th century and is the oldest church building in Caithness..

Crosskirk Bay, with the salmon fishing river Forss Water running into it. The iconic ruined building next to the stony beach, next to the river, provides photographers an interesting background to the rugged coastal landscape. The beach, ruined building, along with St Mary's Chapel is a short walk (half a mile to the Chapel, around 10 minutes steady walk)

Dogs need to be kept on the lead when livestock is seen in the farm fields.

- The walk begins at Forss House Hotel. Head along the side of the hotel past the glassed in dining area and down the hill to the river.
- Follow the footpath along the river as it curves and makes its way to the sea.
- You will reach a footbridge just before the river opens to the sea. Either ignore the bridge and continue on to the edge of the sea and the abandoned stone building. Or, cross over the bridge and make your way up the steep bank heading west. Walk along the top of the cliff and enjoy the breathtaking views out to sea.

- You will come across St. Mary's, the 12th century church. Feel free to explore the ruins.

- After St. Mary's, return down to the mouth of the Forss River. You can either make your way back the way you came, or climb the bank to the east and walk along the road to the A836. Once you reach the A836 turn right and the entrance to Forss House Hotel will be on the right.

## JACK RUSSELL WALK

Website: [Walk Highlands](#)

Distance - 3 miles

Duration - 1 hour

Difficulty - Easy

Dunnet Bay is a fantastic sweeping arc of sand backed by dunes. A bird life haven, the beach is also popular with surfers, beach combers and walkers.

Steps down to reach the beach, then sandy beach

- There is a large car park at the north end of Dunnet Bay, next to the campsite. There is an information point here with an exhibition on the local wildlife which is manned by rangers in the summer months, there are also toilets. From the car park follow the path alongside a wall of Caithness stone built for the millennium and signed for beach viewpoint. The viewpoint is soon reached with far reaching views over the dunes and the beach.
- Follow the steps down to the shore and turn left to walk along the beach. The bay is a haven for many types of sea bird although many have to compete in

the water with surfers who congregate here when the conditions are right. The dunes are a fragile habitat and visitors are encouraged not to walk on them as the marram grass is easily destroyed which in turn leads to erosion of the dunes themselves.

- Walk as far as you wish along the beach, crossing a stream approximately half way along - it is much easier to cross further out on the sand rather than at the edge of the dunes, assuming the tide is sufficiently far out. Here it is possible to follow an eroded path alongside the stream to a second car park and then to return along the road, however the road is quite fast and the beach usually makes a more pleasant option.
- Where a larger stream comes down onto the beach it is time to turn back. Return along the beach looking out for oystercatchers, eider ducks, red throated divers, golden eye, great northern diver, curlew and ringed plover which can be seen here in the water or on the shore. The beach is also a great place to hunt for shells with many whelks and razor shells on the sand. Return up the steps to the car park and the start of the walk.

## SPANIEL WAY

Stage 1: [Walk Highlands](#)

Stage 2: [Walk Highlands](#)

Distance - 6 miles

Duration - 4 hours

Difficulty - Moderate

Stage 1: 5 Miles. This out-and-back walk links the town of Thurso to its busy modern port and ferry terminal, Scrabster.

It can be done for its own merit, or as the first part of a longer walk around Holburn Head. The time and distance given is for the return walk, but it is also possible to catch a bus back to town.

Stage 2: 4.5 Miles. This fine circuit takes in some of the very best of the Caithness coastline, with magnificent cliffs, a giant stack, blow holes and geos. There are great views over Thurso and across to Hoy, with the Orkney ferry often seen crossing the turbulent waters of the Pentland Firth.

### STAGE 1

- The walk as described here begins from the Riverside car park in Thurso, set to the east of the main street. Begin the walk by following the river downstream towards the harbour. The ruined church over to the left is St Peter's, dating back to the 13th century.
- Keep following the river towards the sea and then round the corner and almost double back to reach Thurso beach. Follow the walkway above the back the beach, passing the old pavilion, now a cafe. The far end of the beach ends in a cliff. Head up the flight of steps, forking right part way up to climb more steps and keep to the coastline.
- Soon a grassy area is reached with some stone seats for enjoying the views back across the bay. Continue on the obvious coastal walkway above the cliffs, passing the campsite at first and rounding the back of a couple of small rocky inlets known as geos.
- For much of the way the left hand side of the path is enclosed by vertically-placed flagstones, a most effective form of fencing

commonly used in this area, making use of the local Caithness flagstones. At one point there is a sea-stack just offshore, and throughout this section the views to Scrabster and out across the sea towards Hoy are excellent.

- At the far end the walkway heads beside a fence to emerge on a small cul-de-sac. Follow this to the main A9 road, turning right along the pavement but then forking off to the right again onto East Gill by a garage and small coastguard building.

- East Gill runs between the cliff-tops and the houses; a large stone seat looks out to the busy ferry terminal. The road briefly becomes a footpath before emerging on the A9 once more. Follow the pavement for the final descent to reach Scrabster and the ferry terminal. There are a couple of cafes and a pub here for refreshments before you walk back the same way. Alternatively you could extend the walk by following the excellent Holburn Head circular route before the return.

## STAGE 2

- There is parking at Scrabster harbour (charge) near the Fisherman's Mission, where there is also a cafe (also a pub and seafood restaurant alongside the harbour). Start by walking along the road towards the ferry terminal, passing the long stay car park on your left. Keep on the left hand side away from the ferry traffic and head for the small road leading north towards the lighthouse. Follow this and just before the lighthouse turn left through a gate marked for Holborn Head and climb uphill.

- Once past the garden bear diagonally right uphill on a faint path. This becomes

clearer and leads to a gate and stile at the corner of a stone wall. Go over the stile and follow the path as it undulates towards a small cairn marking Holborn Head. The island of Hoy can be seen straight ahead, with its celebrated Old Man visible in clear weather. Drainage ditches are crossed on a series of small concrete bridges. Cross a fence at a stile and continue to another stile and open gateway where you continue along the path, heading straight for another stile with the cairn directly ahead.

- Follow the path to the cairn for great views both over the sea and along the cliff tops to come; there's a deep cave going right into the cliff just to the west. Return to the fork in the path and take the path to the right skirting the edge of the cliff, and passing the narrow, slit-like blowhole above the cave - you can't see into it, but you can certainly hear it!

- Take care as the cliffs are high and unprotected, and can be dangerous in windy weather. The path goes past a natural arch which also acts as a blow hole (known locally as a gloup) in rough seas. Follow the path along the coast keeping the cliffs on your right.

- The path passes an impressive sea stack - the Clett - which has an arch on its west side. Pass Robertson's Point; the path keeps on the outside of the fence passing some impressively high cliffs, some with caves visible at the bottom. At one point the fence comes uncomfortably close to the cliff edge for those with vertigo, but there's a concrete slab underfoot.

- Pass Spear Head, and a series of jutting cliffs known as the Turrets. Eventually a

deep and wide geo, or inlet caused by sea erosion, is reached. On the far side flagstones can be seen sticking up, the remains of old boundaries. The stone was which quarried just behind the coast here. Keep the fence on your left as you head along the near side of the geo, and then go through the gate ahead, leaving the coast and heading inland along the edge of the field, keeping a fenceline on your left. At the end of the field a track is reached; turn left along this, passing through a gate.

- The track which was built for the, now disused, clifftop quarries, crosses barren moorland used for sheep grazing and passes a lochan on the right. Keep following the track and a Caithness stone sculpture comes into view ahead on the right. Go through a gate (which may have to be climbed) before passing a building and heading downhill towards the outskirts of Scrabster. Continue straight ahead when the road is reached and just before the T junction with the clifftop road head diagonally left across a parking area to a gate which leads to a long series of steps down to the harbour road. Once at the road turn left to return to Scrabster harbour and the start of the walk.

## LABRADOR TRAIL

Website: [Walk Highlands](#)

Distance - 5 miles

Duration - 4 hours

Difficulty - Moderate

An exploration of the coastline that makes up the eastern side of Thurso Bay, this walk passes the ruinous Thurso Castle and has good views across to Scrabster, Dunnet Head and Hoy. Thurso is renowned for its surf and you may see surfers braving the

waves.

- The walk begins from the Riverside car park in Thurso, set to the east of the main street. Begin the walk by crossing the footbridge over the River Thurso. Bear left to cross the park on a path and then continue left along the road. Pass some houses to the right and then pass between several warehouses to emerge at the mouth of the river and its breakwaters.

- Continue to the end of the road; as the track becomes the driveway of a final house, fork left through a gate. A grassy path now continues along the coastline, passing beneath the ruinous Thurso Castle. The present castle was built in the 19th century and replaced a much earlier one; it is in a dangerous state of repair so keep away from the walls.

- Beyond the castle, continue on the coastal path, passing between the large corrugated iron barn and the sea. Soon a parking area and the North Shore Surf Clubhouse is reached - keep to the grassy path right beside the sea. This side of Thurso Bay is renowned for its waves, and you may see surfers attempting to ride the breakers.

- The path eventually soon reaches a stone Victorian harbour lookout, with grand views of Thurso and its bay, terminated on the far side by the cliffs of Holburn Head. The walk dog-legs right here on the clear but unimproved path above a line of very low coastal cliffs. The waves sometimes break along here with terrific force and there are some good though small coastal formations, with miniature stacks and wave-cut platforms as the walk continues.

- Keep to the seaward side of a sewage

works with a wind turbine. There are good views towards the cliffs of Dunnet Head and the island of Hoy beyond. There's a low fence across the route; the stile was broken on our most recent visit, but you can easily step over to continue the walk; it is worth going as far as the East Lug of Tung before turning back towards Thurso.

- You could simply retrace your steps along the coast right back to Thurso, but you may have noticed a strange castellated building up in the fields to the right earlier in the walk. To visit this, turn left away from the coast immediately beyond (on the Thurso side) of the sewage works and turbine. A path leads inland between the fence of this complex and the field adjacent, soon emerging on a track, which then becomes a tarmac lane. Continue until the lane turns right. From here you can detour into the field (grazing livestock) containing the strange monument. Known as Harold's Tower, it looks like a strangely bulging pebble-dashed miniature castle, but is actually a mausoleum of Clan Sinclair.

- Return to the tarmac lane and follow it ahead, ignoring turnings off to the right. It eventually joins the A836 next to an ornate gate house. Go straight on along the pavement, passing a school; about three hundred metres past this turn right down a road that gives access to the footbridge over the River Thurso crossed earlier. Head back across this to return to

the Riverside car park.

## DOBERMAN HIKE

Website: [WalkingWorld](http://WalkingWorld.co.uk)

Distance - 5.5 miles

Duration - 2.5 hours

Difficulty - Easy

The walk is an interesting way to reach Halkirk, the first planned town in Scotland. You can see various birds diving in and out of the river. Also when the season is 'on' there are many people fishing along the riverside; there is a 'catch and release' policy on the river, that means that any fish caught has to be put back into the river. Also along the way is the added bonus of walking a myriad of paths that have been set up by the owners at Geiss Farm and there is an old ruined distillery next to the fast-flowing waterfall.

Please note that this is a linear walk; return is by regular bus from Halkirk.

The start point is at the large car parking area next to the footbridge which spans the River Thurso. There is no real set way to get there; it all depends where walkers live or stay.

Additional info:

Please follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code at all times, with particular regard to dogs, as there are a lot of sheep flocks in this area.

It can be very wet in places so waterproof footwear is needed.

- From the car park opposite the Riverside Shop (by the council bins) walk along the pavement towards the main road-bridge. Proceed across the main



road towards the marked signpost.

- Riverside Walk Route map describing various details about the walk; follow the right path up to the next waymark.

- Go through the gate and proceed up the pavement and the track till you pass the housing estate on the right. Here you will find the next waymark.

- Turn left on the track and walk down to the farm buildings. After going through the two farm gates the river should come into view.

- Take the path to the riverside and turn right. Follow the river to the railway.

- When safe to, cross the railway line, making sure that the gates are closed behind you. Trains are only about four per day but there could be goods trains. Timetables can be obtained from the station in Thurso. If more info' is required there is a telephone that can be used.

- This is the quite large boggy field. It is suggested that you turn right and follow the fence around it - unless you have wellie boots!

- This is a view of the other side of the boggy field. Continue to follow the fence towards the river and then proceed along till you reach Braal House, then follow the tarmac road to the main road, turn left and go across the end of the bridge, which is the end point.

- This is the end of the walk, Ulbster Arms Hotel. To return to Thurso there is a comprehensive bus service that can be used. There is a timetable in the bus shelter next to the bridge. The hotel can

serve refreshments to help you recover.

## WOLFHOUND WANDER

Website: [Walk Highlands](#)

Distance - 10 miles

Duration - 6 hours

Difficulty - Challenging

Dunnet Head is the most northerly point of mainland Britain. This superb and challenging coastal walk approaches it along the top of its fine sandstone cliffs, rich in birdlife and now a nature reserve. There are superb views, particularly across the sea to Hoy.

Narrow paths in the heather with steep ascents and some boggy sections. Much of the route is along unprotected vertical cliff edges and great care is needed.

- There is parking at Dwarwick Pier. The concrete slipway bears a plaque commemorating a visit by the Queen en route to visit her mother at the nearby Castle of Mey; there is also a picnic area. Begin the walk by following the clear but narrow path which climbs up through a kissing-gate and continues up the steep hillside to the west. It soon crosses another path running across the hill; continue straight ahead uphill here as the path to the left ends at a cliff-edge.

- At the top of this steep rise the going levels off into heather moorland; the Northern Gate House is the fine whitewashed house visible far to the right. Continue gently downhill on the path just back from the cliff edge to the next bay; if the tide is out there is an inaccessible sandy beach below the cliffs. At the far

end of the bay is the decaying ruin of a house; beyond this the path climbs steeply before levelling off onto another high moorland section. Pass the top of two deep geos (rocky inlets carved by the sea) - Rowrash and the Stony Mouth.

- The two small outflows of the Loch of Bushta are crossed, the second at a dramatic geo known as the Thirl. Just beyond this is Chapel Geo - the group of stones to the right here is all that remains of the chapel that gave it its name. Just beyond Chapel Geo the coast rises steeply once more and the path cuts across the steep slope above the cliff. Great care is needed if tackling this dangerous section which can instead be avoided by heading directly up the very steep heather slope aiming just to the right of the broken rocks, with good views back over the Loch of Bushta. Once above this steep climb you can either rejoin the path over to the left, passing behind the shallow but broader Rowramps geo, to reach a second steep rise, or you can avoid this too by tackling the heather slopes of Chapel Hill ahead more directly. Either way, the walk resumes above these two steepest climbs on the walk.

- The great sandstone cliffs are now around 75 metres high, a great habitat for hordes of nesting seabirds including puffins in summer as well as guillemots, fulmars, razorbills and kittiwakes. Detour slightly to the right to pass the back of the vertically-sided Donald Gear's geo. The views are superb, from the undercut Holburn Head to the west and the great cliffs of the island of Hoy to the north, its famous Old Man seen sticking up over a lower promontory. The Red Geo is next, perhaps the most impressive of all, its

great walls of sandstone giving it its name. Dunnet Head lighthouse has come into view, seen across Sanders Loch; continue round to reach the wider Ashy Geo with more fine cliff scenery. After just over another kilometre there are two geos together enclosing a narrow strip of vertically-sided rock.

- Further on is a deep trench running parallel to the coast, known as the Long Byre. It is best negotiated by keeping to the right. Continue round the clifftop towards the Lighthouse; when the path forks on the approach to the fine stone wall, take the right hand fork alongside the wall to reach the Dunnet Head road, turning left to visit the Lighthouse. Like most in Scotland it was built by the Stevenson family who specialised in lighthouse construction; Dunnet Head was built by Robert Stevenson who was the grandfather of the writer Robert Louis Stevenson. Amazingly, although the light is a towering 105 metres above sea-level, the windows have been smashed by rocks thrown up from the sea during terrific storms. Dunnet Head is the most northerly point on mainland Britain.

- It is well worth making the short ascent up to the viewpoint on top of the hill, marked by a triangulation pillar. To reach it, facing away from the lighthouse, take the track that heads off to the left just before reaching the outer stone wall. The track winds up to the top between derelict old army buildings. This was an important place during the second World War as the views stretch across the whole northern coastline from Cape Wrath to Duncansby Head, whilst more importantly there is an excellent view of the entrance to Scapa Flow, the great natural harbour at the



heart of Orkney which acted as base for the British fleet. Today's visitors are most likely to be impressed by the view of Hoy in fine weather, its red sandstone cliffs rising to a great height and with the Old Man just visible over to the left.

- Return back to the Dunnet Head car park; unless you have arranged to be picked up, most of the rest of the walk is along the road to the south. It curves around the Long Loch and has some fine scenery and views. It reaches the coast at Brough; it was from here that the materials for the lighthouse had to be taken to Dunnet by horse and cart. There are good views across the rocky bay, marked by the stack of Clett. Continue along the road to a t-junction; turn right here (signed for Thurso). After two more kilometres, and two hundred and fifty metres after a bend to the left, a grassy path heads off to the right. This enables a short-cut across to the minor road in West Dunnet. Turn left and then immediately right off this road, and then left at the next two t-junctions, before finally turning right along the public road. Follow this past the houses and go straight on at Mary Ann's cottage - a small but excellent museum of crofting. The road leads on down to Dwarwick Pier.