

Stage 3: Alness to Tain

The route goes along a quiet rural roads for several miles, then through a long section of forestry commission land before a final road section into Tain.

Status

Green (unmarked). The third stage of the JOGT is entirely walkable by the average fit walker. There are no obstacles. About 2/3 of the walk is on quiet back roads and 1/3 is on good forestry plantation tracks. None of the stage is marked.

Risks

Road walking, even on quiet back lanes such as on this stage, can always be dangerous. Walk on the right except at right curves.

Stage End Information

Tain is close to but bypassed by the A9 and is served by the buses that connect to Wick, John O'Groats, Thurso, and Inverness. It is also served by the Inverness-to-Thurso/Wick rail line. From the Tain rail station, walk up hill into town. When you reach the High Street, turn right and you will see the Royal Tain Hotel where the stage begins. Tain is a medium-sized town with several hotels, pubs, and shops, including a full-size supermarket at either end of town. There is a museum of the history of Tain, but the biggest tourist attraction, the Glenmorangie Distillery, is just north of town (and on this stage route).

Stage 1

Starting from the bridge over the River Aveyron, head east briefly along the High Street, then turn left up Ardross Road. Keep straight along this road heading out of town; there is a pavement on the right hand side as far as the end of speed restriction signs. After around 1km, turn right onto a road signed for Scotsburn and Tain. The route now follows this quiet minor road for several kilometres. Ignore a first turning on the left, but take the second left, again signed for Scotsburn and Tain. Ignore another turning on the left (for Culcairn).



Stage 2

After several more kilometres ignore another turning on the right (Tomich A9 and Invergordon), keeping straight on, and finally ignore another turning on the left (Ardross). Shortly after this last junction, leave the road by turning right onto a tarred lane for Easter Stoneyfield. When this reaches the edge of the trees (and before you reach the house) leave the lane, turning left onto an initially overgrown path along the inside edge of the woods. When a path junction is reached turn left; soon the path becomes clearer as an old track, though it too is becoming overgrown. Continue ahead through the trees for over 1.5km, passing a small pond on your left; the going becomes briefly very boggy.



Stage 3

Eventually the track swings left and then right (through a locked gate) to reach a minor road; turn left along this road. Soon this reaches a t-junction; turn right here (signed Tain 6.5 miles). Continue along the road for 1.5km until the entrance to Scotsburn Farm on the left - turn left up this track. At a fork bear right, heading through a gate to reach an old watermill. Turn left immediately through the gate along the near side of the mill, reaching a gate at the top of the field. Pass through two gates to keep straight ahead on an overgrown path. Eventually this leads up to a much clearer path at a t-junction; turn right here.



Stage 4

Almost immediately the clear path reaches a pedestrian gate; do not pass through, instead turning left before it to follow another overgrown path uphill. Eventually this reaches an initially muddy track. Turn right along this; after a turning area it becomes a hard forestry track. Keep straight ahead along this; there are open views in places towards Cromarty and looking back towards the distant Strathfarrar hills. When the track forks take the left branch, slightly uphill. Ignore tracks off on either side, eventually reaching a wide main junction of tracks.



Stage 5

Continue ahead, and after almost a kilometre come to a T-junction. The Forestry Commission 'Aldie Burn' car park is to the right, but turn left instead. Cross an earthen bridge and turn right at a

junction. Then after another minute, keep right at a wide three-way junction. Go along a pleasant track to emerge on the tarmac Scotsburn Road again and turn left. Continue several further kilometres toward Tain.



Stage 6

As the busy traffic of the A9 appears ahead, follow cycle route 1 markers for the tarmac cycle path to the left, and continue to follow the markers and tarmac path through a tunnel under the A9. Turn right on the road, and left at the next junction to find yourself back on Scotsburn Road. Continue downhill into the centre of Tain, where the stage ends at the Royal Tain Hotel.

Stage 4: Tain to Dornoch

8.6 miles | 13.9 km

This stage starts in Tain and leads past a famous distillery before crossing a kilometre-long bridge. It then goes along the shore of Loch Fleet before following a country lane into lovely Dornoch. The long bridge and the approach to it aren't much fun, the longest walk along an A-road on the entire trail route. But besides that it is a nice walk.

Status

Green (unmarked). The fourth stage of the JOGT is entirely walkable by the average fit walker. The walk is mostly on quiet back roads. There are no obstacles, except to cross a barrier to descend from the A9 and two gates that may need to be climbed over. None of the stage is marked.

Risks

The long section on the A9 should be walked with care, as there is no barrier to protect the walker from road traffic. However, there is a verge, and on the bridge itself there is a pavement. Road walking, even on quiet back lanes, can always be dangerous. Walk on the right except at right curves.

Stage End Information

Dornoch is three km by car from the A9 and is served by the buses that connect to Wick, John O'Groats, Thurso, and Inverness. Dornoch is a small town with a couple of each of hotels, pubs, and shops. The central shopping area around the church and the square is lovely.

Walk Description

Stage 1

From the centre of Tain outside the Sheriff Court, head NW along the main B9174 (initially Tower Street, then Academy Street), keeping along the pavement, passing Lidl and continuing on the verge to reach the A9 bypass. Turn right to walk along the verge of the A9, then cross with care and head up the tarmac lane on the opposite side signed for Tarlogie. (If you wish to detour to visit Glenmorangie Distillery, do not cross but continue along the A9 verge until the signs for the Distillery - noting the track off the opposite side of the A9. After visiting the distillery take this track, rejoining the main route at the cottages at Tarlogie Farm in the next paragraph).



Stage 2

The main route follows the tarmac lane until a beautiful lodge house where the tarmac swings left; leave it and continue ahead on an unsurfaced track through attractive woodland. When the track swings right into the garden of a house leave it and keep ahead across the grass, following a path to the left side of a fence. This leads to a row of whitewashed cottages (the route via Glenmorangie Distillery rejoins from the right here). Go straight ahead past the row of cottages down a track.



Stage 3

The track bends right and leads down to a roundabout on the main A9. Take great care here; it is best to pass round the right side of the roundabout, crossing the A9, and then following the A9 exit towards Dornoch. Continue along the verge and onto the bridge, where there is a pavement.



Stage 4

Although very busy with traffic, the walk over the bridge does give great views over the Firth; looking inland the mast on [Struie Hill](#) is prominent. At the far side of the bridge is a parking layby. Look over the barrier for a path that heads very steeply down the embankment, bearing right at the bottom. There is a wire fence currently with no stile to cross before you can reach the shore.



Stage 5

Turn left and follow a grassy path along the shoreline; it gradually widens into a grassy track. Eventually it swings left away from the Firth, continuing between two fences.



Stage 6

Continue along the track until it reaches the road, and then turn right along this. The minor road is followed for just under 2km but is usually very quiet.



Stage 7

When Camore Woods are reached take a left turn as signed for the woods car park. Pass through the car park and through a gate, then stay on the track to go past the metal farm gate and continue ahead on the right hand track when it forks. This heads through the pine woods which stand on a gravel ridge left behind by the Ice Age. After a bench follow the track as it curves right. A mound on the right holds the remains of a settlement, in total there are the remains of more than 25 hut circles and chambered cairns dating back to 2-3000 years ago within the forest. Immediately after the mound turn right at a crossroads.



Stage 8

Stay on the main track to eventually reach a pedestrian and farm gate. Go through this and follow the path alongside the fence. The prehistoric standing stone in the field on the right is where St Gilbert is said to have slain the Dornoch dragon with a bow and arrow. At the road, cross and turn right to follow the pavement into Dornoch, passing the school and staying on the main road to reach the beautiful town centre.

Stage 5: Dornoch to Golspie

Please see the note below the map at the bottom of this page.



Loch Fleet Shore
13.8 miles | 22.4 km

This stage of the walk is something of a change: mostly walking along the shores of Loch Fleet and through woods, with much less time by the sea. It is mostly level walking and quite pleasant. This stage starts from the centre of Dornoch and goes along a gentle sea coast before turning inland and going round Loch Fleet. It then crosses the bridge known as The Mound at the head of Loch Fleet before going through pretty Balblair Wood on the way to Golspie.

Status

Amber, almost **Green** (mostly unmarked). The fifth stage of the JOGT is entirely walkable by the average fit walker. There are few obstacles: one or two barbed wire fences that may need to be climbed. A mixture of road and path, with frequent transitions from one to the other. Little of the stage is marked.

Risks

Road walking, even on quiet back lanes such as on this stage, can be dangerous: walk on the right except at right curves. One or two fields with livestock may need to be crossed: always be careful of bulls or cows with calves.

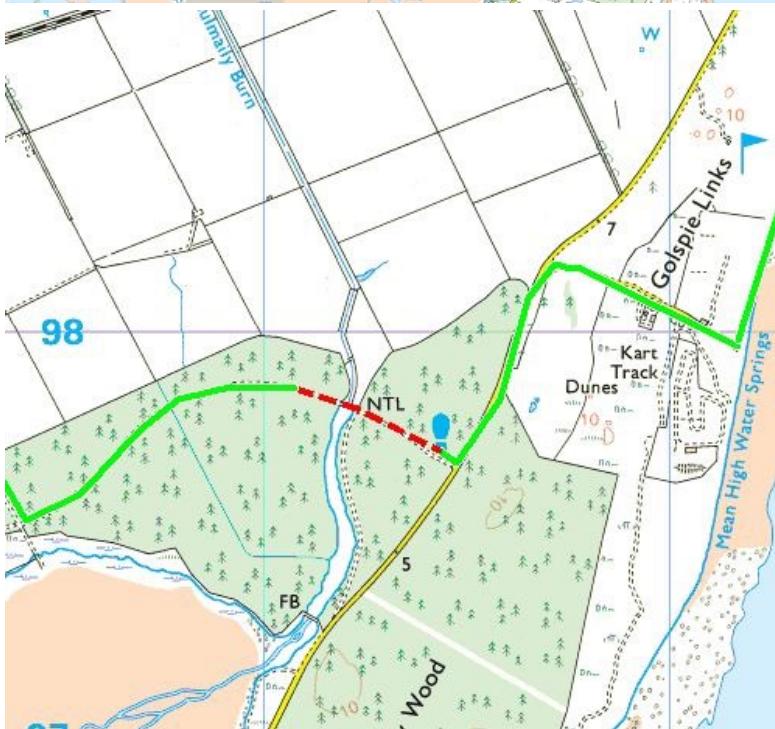
Stage End Information

Golspie is on the Inverness-to-Wick rail line and is accessible by car via the A9 and by X97/X99 Stagecoach busses that connect to Wick, John O'Groats, Thurso, and Inverness. Golspie is a small town with several hotels and B&Bs, a few pub/restaurants, and a couple shops.

Balblair Wood

The bridge over the Culmaily Burn just leaving or entering Balblair woods (GR. NH 812 978) has been damaged. The bridge is still in service (to the best of our knowledge) but will be undergoing repairs at some point. If we get dates we will post them here.

Green : Route of the Trail
Red : Location of damaged bridge



Walk Description

Stage 1

From the centre of Dornoch take Church Street south from Bridge Street and soon turn left onto Golf Road which leads to the beach car park. Go through the car park to pick up the track running along the seaward side of the golf course (at low tide you could also walk on the sand although it is necessary to come up to the track to avoid a rocky outcrop).



Stage 2

After the small headland the path heads inland slightly and climbs to a double set of gates with a sign for Embo. The JGT is marked to turn left here, up across the field to a farm track along an old railway. Turn right on the farm track and follow it to a tarmac road. Keep left on the road and when it bends left at a junction, keep straight ahead on a grassy track to stay on the old railway line. If instead you want to go to Embo for the caravan park or shop, keep ahead at the sign for Embo. Follow the path through the dunes with Ben Bhraggie and its 100 foot tall statue of the Duke of Sutherland clearly visible in the distance. When the path emerges on a small track go straight across to cross the burn and enter Grannie's Heilan Hame caravan park. Turn left to follow the track through the park, going straight ahead at two roundabouts and then keeping left to pass a telephone box and straight ahead to leave by the park entrance.



Stage 3

Go straight ahead from the parking area onto a tarred lane into Embo. When a t-junction is reached with Front Street, turn left. Go right at the next crossroads, then keep straight ahead when the main road swings left. Go ahead again alongside the parking area, then pass to the left side of the post office/shop. A grassy path leads through an area of tall grasses, passing through a kissing gate. Turn left on a path beyond the gate, then turn right when this reaches a t-junction with a path along what was once the old railway line. You are now back on the marked JGT.



Stage 4

There are good views to the huge monument on [Ben Bhraggie](#) across the other side of Loch Fleet. Keep straight on through the gorse bushes at a path junction, staying on the old railway line; at one

point the route passes an old signal house. Pass through a gate and continue ahead, watching for a stile on your left into a field. Cross the stile and look for another stile across the field at a fence corner. Leave the field and turn right along the farm driveway and in a minute, continue ahead on the public road. Keep straight ahead at a junction, to come alongside Loch Fleet below the ruins of Skelbo Castle.



Stage 5

Continue along the road by the shores of Loch Fleet until just before the junction with the A9. At a house on the left called the Gate House, bear right into trees to stay on the old railway. Follow this for over a kilometre. Eventually emerge from trees to ascend the highway embankment. Continue along the very narrow verge of A9 with great care, crossing the bridge and keeping ahead when the Lairg road goes off left. Turn off the A9 250m beyond onto a forest track cutting sharp right; it immediately narrows to a path.



Stage 6

When the former track becomes impassable follow the path to the left, heading towards the larch plantation. The path improves and leads on ahead through the trees, then becomes fainter as it continues towards the left edge of the forest. Keep inside the fence until a stile is reached (white waymarker paint blob). Cross this and the ditch ahead, continuing through the field with a fence on your left. Pass right round the field edge until it reaches a gate in the far corner near the railway. Go through the gate and continue with the fenced railway line on your right. Pass through another gate and follow a path through the field until it reaches a gate and track just to the left of a house.



Stage 7

Go straight across the track through the gate on the other side, then turn right to follow the edge of the field and then once more alongside the railway fence. This eventually leads to a tarmac road with a private level crossing. Turn right along the tarmac, using the crossing, and follow the road which reaches a gate at the entrance to Balblair Wood. Go straight ahead, now on a track, through the woods. When a t-junction is reached with Loch Fleet visible ahead turn left, following a broad path through the trees. This passes a bench and crosses a bridge before it emerges at a minor road.



Stage 8

Turn left along the road for just over 500m until a track on the right, signed as 'Coastal Route to Littleferry'. Follow the track across the golf course and past the caravan park. At the end head up onto the dunes. From here a fine sandy beach stretches out towards Golspie (left) - you can either walk along the beach, or inland on a dune path.



Stage 9

At the edge of the village a ramp leads up from the beach onto Golspie's sea wall; from here continue to the jetty. Follow the tarred coastal path beyond the jetty; when it reaches a playpark turn left to head to the main street, and then right along it to reach the centre of Golspie.

Stage 6: Golspie to Brora



Dunrobin Castle

6.2 miles | 10.1 km

This stage starts in Golspie, crossing a lovely bridge and going through meadows next to the sea. It then passes massive and fairy-tale-like Dunrobin Castle. You then go through a wood, one of the few along the coast path. There are many meadows and fields, and at one point the small pretty cliffs come close to the sea, but you always have plenty of room to walk. Finally you pass an old World War II radio intercept station on the way into Brora with its lovely waterfront and tiny harbour. This stage is shorter and gentler than most others. The main challenge is knowing which side of the fence to walk on.

Status

Green (unmarked). The sixth stage of the JOGT is entirely walkable by the average fit walker. All on path or worn footway, there are no obstacles. None of the stage is marked.

Risks

There may be livestock in one or two fields. If so, always be careful of bulls or cows with calves.

Stage End Information

Brora is on the Inverness-to-Wick rail line. Brora is accessible by car via the A9 and by X97/X99 Stagecoach buses that connect to Wick, John O'Groats, Thurso, and Inverness. Brora is a small town with several hotels and B&Bs, a few pub/restaurants, and a couple shops. There is an old World War II radio intercept station near the sea that is now in private use.

Walk Description

Stage 1

From the centre of Golspie, start by heading ENE along the High Street, before forking right onto Duke Street, which has some beautiful old estate buildings. At the far end cross the footbridge to the left of the ford, then head through the gate to the left of the cottage onto open grassland with the sea ahead. Ignore a path forking off to the right, keeping ahead to another gate. Soon the path comes alongside the shoreline and continues by the sea.



Stage 2

Soon the spectacular Dunrobin Castle comes into view. This huge house, the biggest in the northern Highlands with 189 rooms, is the ancestral home of the Earls and Dukes of Sutherland, some of whom were notorious for their role in the Highland Clearances. Parts date back to the 1300s although most of the current castle was built in Victorian times by Charles Barry, who also designed the Houses of Parliament. Today it is a major visitor attraction. Continue along the path, briefly passing through some bushes, to follow the seafront track between Dunrobin Castle gardens and the sea; ignore branches off to the left.



Stage 3

When the wide track swings left at the edge of the woods ('Private' sign), leave it by keeping right on the path on the inland side of the seawall. This soon leads through some beautiful deciduous woodland. At a path junction keep straight ahead (signed 'Brora'). Pass through a gate into open grassland and continue across this close by the shore, passing through two more gates.



Stage 4

The old ruin visible up to the left is Dun Liath broch; it is well worth visiting and can be reached by a short detour; head across the grass to reach the track which climbs up to its left. This well-preserved iron-age structure dates back two thousand years. Walk round to the far side to reach the entrance and visit the inside of the broch. The double stone wall encloses a watchroom on the right whilst post holes suggest that the internal circular space may once have had a wooden structure and roof. At the far side is a staircase which still leads up onto the top of the walls. It is thought that brochs may have provided temporary refuge for families during times of raids. From the broch, return to the route along the grassy foreshore.



Stage 5

The path passes through a gate to the left of a dilapidated old iron shed right by the sea. When a shoreline fence starts, it is better to walk on the seaward side of it at first, at one point passing below a white cliff. After the cliff you can either continue on the pebbly shore or take a path that rises to the left a little and runs through a hidden valley.



Stage 6

If you take the higher path, head back down to the shore when it reaches a fine waterfall; there is a deep pool here but it's usually possible to cross on the shore. In spate conditions there is a bridge above the waterfall, but heading back down to the shore after crossing that may involve negotiating a couple of electric fences off to the right up a track marked 'Croft access', so its usually easier to keep down by the sea.



Stage 7

Soon there is a grassy path just above the shore once more. As you continue the going becomes rough on the seaward side of the fence, with easier walking on the inland side. If walking on this side, continue through the fields until a gate (where there is a large shed building to the left); go through the gate and then keep right by the fence enclosing the copse of conifers to reach a crossing point back to get you back the seaward side. Now continue on the seaward side of the fence; further on the route keeps to the right of a high fence enclosing an old World War II radio intercept station.



Stage 8

Beyond this Brora beach car park is reached. Join the tarmac road, keeping straight ahead where Salt Street joins in from the left. When you are above the harbour you can bear right down to reach it. From here a path continues upstream beside the Brora river, passing a huge old ice house. It then climbs up and joins a road to pass under the railway and meet the main A9 in the centre of Brora.

Stage 7: Brora to Helmsdale



Brora Beach
12.8 miles | 20.8 km

The stage starts in Brora with nice easy walking along a path between a golf course and the sea. Then the path is squeezed between the sea and the railway, making for some slightly challenging terrain. Ford a small river, go through a large peaceful caravan park and then continue along the grassy foreshore for several miles. The trail crosses the railway and passes through the lovely village of Portgower and then along old lanes on a hillside on the way into Helmsdale.

Status

Amber, almost **Green** (partially marked). The seventh stage of the JOGT includes the minor challenges of a) fording the 3-4 metre wide Loth River, b) fording the 1.5 metre wide Kilmote Burn and c) from June through October there will be tall grass, up to 2 ft high, to push your way through. The stage is marked from the burn at the north end of Brora Golf Course until you reach Portgower, a length of approximately 7 miles. Otherwise unmarked. Route description is needed to get from Portgower to Helmsdale by the inland route. Alternatively, the shoreline route past Portgower into Helmsdale is rough and may be tidal.

Risks

Beware of cows with calves north of the golf course and also north of Kilmote Burn. Be careful fording burns.

Stage End Information

Helmsdale is the last east coast stop on the Inverness-to-Wick rail line until Wick itself. Helmsdale is accessible by car via the A99 and by buses that connect to Wick, John O'Groats, Thurso, and Inverness. Helmsdale is a small town with several hotels and B&Bs, a youth hostel, a few pub/restaurants, and a couple shops. The excellent Navidale House Hotel, a sumptuously maintained old hunting lodge, is just a km north of central Helmsdale along the main road and also accessible from the walking route. There is also B&B accommodation in the lovely old village of Portgower just 3 km before Helmsdale.

Walk Description

Stage 1

From the Co-op in the centre of Brora turn right onto the A9 and cross the bridge over the river. Turn right onto Golf Road and follow this past the Royal Marine Hotel. After the road bends left turn off into the golf club/beach car park and go through the kissing gate on the right and take the steps down towards the river. Follow a faint coastal path towards the sea which soon turns north. You can either continue following the path along the edge of the golf course or at lower tides walk on the sandy beach. At a couple of points you will have to head inland to cross small burns on bridges on the golf course path.



Stage 2

After the golf course there is a burn which can usually be crossed on pebble stepping stones or at low tide near the sea where it should be shallower. The next section is hemmed in between the railway and the shore, at low tide it may be possible to continue on the pebbles otherwise there is a narrow, uneven path alongside the railway fence, either way the going is a little difficult underfoot.

At a stone bridge it is necessary to cross the burn on stepping stones although a wade may be necessary if the water level is high. Soon afterwards a gate leads into a field, cross this on sheep tracks keeping straight ahead.



Stage 3

Stay on the inland side of the fence (look for the white waymarkers on fence posts) and after passing an old fishing hut a burn is reached which is usually easily crossed. Continue through the field, heading through a gateway and following a sometimes-muddy track to a set of double farm gates. Go through these and continue on the track as it heads inland through a fence, climbing slightly to stay on the left of some small dunes. At the end of the fenced field go over the stile and continue around the coast on sometimes very overgrown ground looking out for the white waymarkers (at low tide it is possible to follow the pebbly then sandy shore instead). There is a very short section on top of a narrow seawall next to the railway, at all but very high tide it should be possible to bypass this on the beach. After this go through a farm gate into a field and continue ahead on a grassy path.



Stage 4

Keep the fence on your right as the ground gets more tussocky underfoot. Aim for the seaward side of the enclosure, soon the railway bridge over the Loth Burn will come into view on the left. Climb the stile at the right hand field corner and find the shallowest place to cross the Loth Burn, it is necessary to wade, do not attempt it if the water level is too high. After crossing go straight ahead aiming for a footpath up through the dunes there are usually a few caravans visible here. Follow the grassy track to the right which passes a concrete lookout and then runs through a caravan and campsite, keep right at the two track junctions. After a small headland pass the last caravan on a path on the right past the stone wall and over a stile in the fence.



Stage 5

Continue ahead on the tussocky ground (at low tide it might be easier to walk on the sand) until a waymarker at the Kilmote Burn which can usually be crossed without wading. On the far side continue through the grass and alongside (still on the sea side of) the railway for about four more km, ignoring two level crossings. Cross two bridges over the Westgarty and Midgarty burns. Finally come to a private level crossing with walkers' stiles over the railway fences. Cross the railway and ascend a track across the hillside. At a junction, turn left and follow the track to the village of Portgower.



Stage 6

Alternative rough shore route to Helmsdale: You can continue past the private level crossing, keeping to the sea side of the railway. This is rough going, often on boulder beach, and should not be attempted in bad weather due to the proximity to the sea. In good conditions, you eventually round a headland and pass under the A9 bridge. A better path forms and leads up to the old Helmsdale bridge. Turn right over the bridge to the roundabout in front of the old Helmsdale Hotel. Turn right here and walk a few minutes to the day's end.



Stage 7

Back with the main route: Turn right on the tarmac road, then walk past the houses of Portgower ignoring the first turn up to the A9 on the left (there is a B&B/tearoom 0.5km on the A9 heading south from here), instead taking the road to the left at the end to reach the A9. Turn right along the A9, then cross with care to head up a lane on the opposite side immediately next to the rockfall / z-bend sign. This initially tarmac lane climbs steeply, ending at a footpath sign for 'Gartymore'.



Stage 8

Continue on the rough and muddy track which descends to cross a bridge over a burn (usually livestock here). On the far side follow the track uphill to the right, soon passing through a gate. From here keep to a faint path which bears right and passes to the right of a ruined house, before heading up left to gain its former entrance track.



Stage 9

Turn right along this, following it until it reaches a larger track. Turn right downhill here, soon crossing a bridge, and then turn left when a tarmac road is reached. At a crossroads keep straight ahead, now with good views of Helmsdale - the end of the stage. The road leads downhill towards the village; as it nears the A9 you can head to the right down steps to reach the A9 pavement. Turn left along the pavement and follow the A9 over the railway and then the river to reach Helmsdale.

Stage 8: Helmsdale to Berriedale



View from Ord of Caithness

8.9 miles | 14.4 km

This stage starts in central Helmsdale and goes along near the shore below cliffs before climbing to cliff tops for spectacular views of the Ord of Caithness headland. You'll cross two ravines and then an old track that runs for over a mile through moorland. Then you'll cross a steep gorge with rushing Ousdale Burn at the bottom. Then walk past the ruined houses of the clearance village of Badbea and then follow another old track high above the sea before descending through pastures with strange follies into tiny Berriedale.

Status

Amber The eighth stage of the JOGT is a rough walk. The first 1.5 miles are along a core path on the foreshore: easy going. The next 2 miles to the county boundary involve walking along cliff tops through high summer grass and bracken, while crossing two small burns. The county boundary is marked by a deer fence which you cross at a ladder stile, about 8 feet high. After that, you need to negotiate your way down a steep slope (overgrown in summer) and then cross Ousdale Burn on a bridge. After the burn, it's just a walk through hillside grazing land and open moorland. There is no barbed wire without a stile. The stage is marked north of the county boundary (the Ord of Caithness).

Risks

Take care in stepping or leaping across burns. The deer fence crossing is a high ladder stile. Pastures descending into Berriedale often contain cattle; beware bulls and cows with calves.

Stage End Information

Berriedale is on the A9 and is served by the X99 Stagecoach service. Berriedale has a cafe (open every day 10-4) and a jewellery shop but no other services or accommodation, and there are no other accommodation or services between Helmsdale and Dunbeath. For end of stage accommodation, carry on to Dunbeath or take bus back to Helmsdale from Berriedale.

Walk Description

Stage 1

Walk down to the harbour at Helmsdale and follow Shore Street east soon passing an old salmon netting station. Just before the next house (Lobster Pots) turn right onto a marked path to pass the house on the seaward side. The grassy path continues behind the shoreline and after rounding the headland of Sron a Chrochair the high cliffs of the route ahead come into view. Head round the back of the bay at Navidale and at the far side turn left to head uphill at an old ruin and sign.



Stage 2

At the top of the sloping path there is a great view back across the bay. Turn sharp right along a grassy path (do not go straight on towards the gate and Navidale Farm). Follow the path on the seaward side of the stone wall and soon go through a gate and continue next to the wall. Go through the next farm gate on the left and keep following the faint grassy track as it crosses the grazing land to reach a dip and continues on the far side passing a small pond on your left and heading across another dip aiming for a concrete WWII observation post on the cliff ahead.



Stage 3

Pass this and continue along the inside of the fence until you go over a stile at the corner to follow a path on the seaward side of the fenced wooded area. The sometimes muddy, narrow path descends into a small ravine, go through the kissing gate at the bottom and up the wet slope on the far side between gorse bushes. Continue straight ahead on faint animal tracks soon heading diagonally left uphill to reach an overgrown old track heading downhill towards the coast and a second observation post. From here you can see the Ord of Caithness, a large band of granite culminating in Ord Point and the grassy Green Table - the site of an ancient fort.



Stage 4

Follow the path along the coast which is faint in places soon heading inland into a ravine to cross Ord burn well beyond the waterfall. The overgrown path continues up the far side of the burn for a few paces before heading back on itself to climb diagonally uphill back towards the coast. Soon there's a good view of the Green Table below. The path climbs through the heather, crossing a deer fence at a basic stile and continuing across open moorland where the old track is easier to make out and heads north, inland towards the A9 with power lines visible and [Morven](#) and other hills of Caithness in the distance. Over to your right the green grass on the far side of the Ousdale Burn is the next landmark. Turn right off the track just before the Allt a' Bhurg.



Stage 5

Follow occasional markers on short posts through tussocky ground and eventually an easier faint path passing the ruins of a settlement but you then need to cross the Allt a'Bhurg before it becomes a ravine. After passing the remains of a broch, cross the stile at the corner of the deer fence with the ravine down on your right. Keep ahead along the edge of the ravine until reaching a marker (in summer hidden in bracken) at a point overlooking Ousdale. Head steeply down the ridge line and through the sparse trees following waymarkers to eventually reach the Ousdale Burn. Cross the footbridge and bear right, pass through a gap in the stone wall, and continue along the other side of the stone wall to climb a fence with wooden bars. Keep ahead over a stile over a much smaller fence, then look up across the hillside (and toward the sea), looking for faint markers ahead.



Stage 6

The route now aims diagonally uphill towards the coast climbing steeply through heather and then traversing the cliffs, there is a faint path but some may be happier on the less sloping ground higher up, as long as you keep aiming north east you will eventually see the monument at Badbea in the distance. The first ruins of Badbea are reached (if you are walking higher up) well before the monument, after these descend to the gate in the fence and go through it to eventually reach a vague path heading up to the memorial. Tenants of inland crofts were first settled here in 1792 having been evicted from their land to make way for more profitable sheep. Life at Badbea would have been harsh and exposed to the elements, many residents emigrated in search of a better life and the memorial commemorates many of them.



Stage 7

From the monument follow the path downhill and then to the left to continue along the coast passing more ruined houses. At the last two houses, which are more complete than the others, and before the large bank of gorse ahead, take a path heading up to a gap in the wall which separated the villagers from the sheep grazing land beyond. Go through the gap and turn right to follow the wall along the coast, the path here is very boggy in places but there are good views of the cliffs ahead. Eventually turn right through a metal farm gate in the wall where a grassy track crosses the wall. The track provides easy walking with good views back along the coast and to the Caithness hills inland.



Stage 8

Follow the track when it swings inland before the coast starts to descend to Berriedale. Go through the farm gate in a stone wall and continue on the track for a few paces before forking right, initially northeast and then eastnortheast, still on a grassy track which soon reaches a gate. Go through this and descend the field aiming diagonally towards the sea to reach a stile over the fence between fields, near the cliff top fence. (Avoid the gate in this fence further to the left, as this area often has cattle and is quite muddy.) Once over the stile, aim for the first of two monuments which actually serve as navigation aids for the tiny harbour at Berriedale.



Stage 9

When you reach the first monument, continue toward the second one lower down ahead (worth a detour for the view), but then about halfway there go a bit left to follow markers down a small ridge line, still inside the field. Follow this down to the lower corner of the field, go through a gate and turn right to find the A9. Turn right on the A9 briefly. Turn right on the next tarmac lane toward the sea to start the next stage, or keep ahead another minute along the A9 to find the cafe on the land side of the road at the tiny hamlet of Berriedale.

Stage 9: Berriedale to Dunbeath



An Dun Headland

6.5 miles | 10.5 km

The route starts at the swing bridge over the Berriedale Water and rises immediately to clifftops and continues at or near the cliff tops most of the way. There are wonderful views and several interesting landscape features along the way.

Status

Amber (partially marked). The ninth stage of the JOGT involves walking through tall summer grass and bracken along much of its length. The burn crossings are small except for one, which you may still be able to leap over except in spate. The stage is marked for about half a mile starting one mile north of Berriedale, and for one mile as it passes round Dunbeath Castle, connecting to the public road into Dunbeath.

Risks

Some sections of the route are along narrow space between fences and clifftops.

Stage End Information

Dunbeath is accessible by car via the A9 and by busses that connect to Wick, John O'Groats, Thurso, and Inverness. Dunbeath is a very small town with a B&B/campground, one restaurant, and two shops.

Walk Description

Stage 1

This stage starts from the cottages on the south side of the river at Berriedale (reachable from the A9 along a private road). Cross the bridge and head along the pebbly path towards the cottages on the far side. After the first house turn left between two properties onto a grassy path which then becomes a rough track heading uphill towards a gate on a bend of the A9. Before reaching the gate leave the track and continue up rough ground (some tracks) just to the right of the road embankment. Keep to the right of a wall enclosing a cemetery, crossing a gate at the top and then turning right along the inside fenceline above the coastal cliffs. This part of the route is waymarked with white paint splashes.



Stage 2

Continue just inside the clifftop fence for one long field. Finally the route cuts slightly left to cross a stile and then continues as the clifftop fence is dilapidated for the next several minutes walking. When a good fence resumes, keep to the outside through dense grasses. Be careful as the way is narrow outside the fence for some distance. Pass a wooden lookout hide and cross a culvert containing a burn. Continue on a path across a grassy area and then cross a tiny bridge. Here the route bends left into the trees; turn immediately right, emerging and heading up through a gate, back on the inside of the clifftop fences.



Stage 3

After passing through a gap between a fence and wall there is briefly a path to follow; leave this as it curves left to head through another gate by the fence corner. The route now continues as a narrow grassy path through thickets of vegetation, mostly just to the left of scrubby trees. A few old fence posts help act as a guide, continuing across the slope until a plantation of straggly Sitka spruces is reached. Turn right to pass this around the downhill side, keeping to the outside of the fence. Soon there are views towards a fine waterfall some distance further along the coastline, and a small arch much closer at the foot of the cliffs.



Stage 4

The next section has a few stiles and white paint markers, crossing several fences. Eventually the route runs to the left of a substantial drystone wall, crosses another stile, and then passes outside the wall through a gate that leans on a post. Continue outside the wall, following a faint track. Further on there are close-up glimpses down to the waterfall which was seen earlier in the distance. Cross a small burn and remain outside fences, and finally go through a low pedestrian gate. Just beyond this is very tussocky ground which slopes steeply down to a burn; at first glance this descent looks impossible, but if you bear slightly left initially over the tussocks after the gate, and if you find marker posts, it is possible to make a careful diagonal descent to the right to reach down to the burn, where a bridge is unexpectedly revealed at the last moment.



Stage 5

Cross the bridge and head up the steep grassy slope beyond, zig-zagging and following marker posts. Keep to the right of a stone wall at the top, back above the clifftops. Soon there is a view to the headland of An Dun, which is almost split from the mainland by a steep slit-like arch. Keep to the seaward side of the wall, passing through a gate in a fence which cuts right towards the sea.



Stage 6

There are views down to a fine sea stack known as The Clett. Steep drops mean it may be necessary to use the inland side of the walls and fences for a time, but please stay outside fences whenever possible to avoid damaging fences and walls and to wear a better trail outside. One wall heading out to sea from a junction of walls can be passed by means of a sheep-creep. When a fence cuts right from the walls cross the gate to continue to the right of a stone wall. Soon there are great views looking back along the coast to both The Clett and An Dun.



Stage 7

Keep to the seaward side of the walls, crossing a small footbridge at one point, until two marker posts indicate two slightly different alternative routes both turning left - the first over a stile before a wall, and the second over a gate just after the wall; the latter is the better route unless there are livestock present, as the near side of the wall becomes boggy. Head away from the coastline up beside the wall until another JoG Trail signpost points the route diagonally right across the field. Continue to reach a stile, and then head across newly planted ground to a second stile leading into a plantation.



Stage 8

Go into the woods, turning left at a fork to cross a footbridge. The route continues through the trees parallel to the A9, emerging at the driveway to Dunbeath Mains. Go straight across this driveway (there are stiles over the walls on either side); once over the far stile turn left and go through a gate to continue along the edge of the trees parallel to the A9. Eventually the path leads through a gap in a stone wall; turn left beyond and meet an old track (once a road) - turn right along this. This soon becomes a more maintained tarmac lane; keep ahead to reach the top end of Dunbeath village with the post office on your right.



Stage 9

Keep straight ahead at a junction with the war memorial, passing the fire station (on your left). Eventually the main road turns sharp left and a narrow road goes off right - ignore both of these, instead taking a footpath straight ahead. This leads past a bench seat and soon gives great views down to Dunbeath harbour. Follow the path down the hill, turning left near the bottom to cut a corner to a track. Cross a footbridge over the burn to reach Dunbeath harbour and the end of the stage.

Stage 10: Dunbeath to Lybster



Old Bridge at Latheronwheel

7.9 miles | 12.6 km.

The route rises immediately to clifftops and continues outside the fences most of the way. There are wonderful views and several interesting landscape features along the way. The route visits the beautiful harbours of Latheronwheel and Lybster, the abandoned fishing station at Achastle-shore, and the sweeping panorama of Forse Bay with its castle at one end and waterfall at the other.

Status

Amber (mostly marked). The tenth stage of the JOGT is a bit rough in places and still involves crossing 2-4 barbed wire fences. It involves walking in tall summer grass along some of its length. The stage is marked from Dunbeath Harbour to Laidhay, from Latheronwheel to Forse, and about a mile at Achastle. The 2/3 mile from the whale-watching viewpoint down to Lybster harbour is a good developed trail and then the walk into Lybster is along a quiet tarmac road.

Risks

Burn crossing may be on slippery rocks with risk of falling. Risk of injury on barbed wire. Risk of injury when crossing dry stone dykes due to falling stones. Beware cows in fields in a couple places.

Stage End Information

Along the walk, there is a friendly butcher shop in Latheronwheel that sells some ready-made food and drink. Lybster is accessible by car via the A99 and by busses that connect to Wick, John O'Groats, Thurso, and Inverness. Lybster is a small town with a couple of each of hotels, pubs, and shops. The long wide Main Street runs from the A99 south to the cliff tops.

Walk Description

Stage 1

Starting from the footbridge over the river near Dunbeath Harbour, head along the road towards the harbour. The road leads round the coastline and then ends at a picnic area. Head through the picnic area to the far end; from here a very faint grassy path makes a zig-zagging ascent up the easiest ground to gain the clifftops. Now atop the cliffs continue on the rough tussocky ground on the outside of the fences.



Stage 2

Soon the route passes above a deep geo with a natural arch. Further on there are views to a pair of very fine sea stacks; shortly after these, at another geo, a stile indicates where it is necessary to keep on the inland side of the fence. Pass round the back of the geo, crossing a shallow ravine at the back - there's a marker post and stile up the other side. Cross the stile, turn right to pass through a gate. Pass round either side of a rectangular field to reach the opposite corner, above the coast once more. Briefly follow a grassy track, then fork right to head past another marker post; the route then gains height to pass a boulder daubed with a white marker. Continue across a heathery slope to near the corner of a deer fence; the walk crosses a stile over a smaller fence and continues along the left side of the deer fence.



Stage 3

After the highest part of the deer fence a very faint path cuts half left across the heather towards another fence - there is a white paint daub on one of the posts (and no more markings for a while). Cross this fence with care, then continue ahead to reach another fence enclosing a steep ravine. It's best to turn left alongside the fence uphill to round the top of the ravine. On the far side, head diagonally left across the field to reach a gate letting into the next field. Keeping parallel to the coast, find another gate beyond it into a larger open field at the bottom of the valley; cross this, keeping left and slowly gaining height as you cross the slope, as the clifftop fence will rise steeply to meet you. Finally walk on a level just inside the clifftop fence. At the next fence corner cross a fence and drystone dyke before turning right to keep along the right hand side of a high deer fence for the next km or so - the going can be overgrown with bracken in high summer.



Stage 4

Keep outside the deer fence, eventually with views of some more sea stacks. At the corner of the deer fence enclosure turn left to follow the fence inland until an old iron turning gate in the wall on the right. Pass through this to follow a grassy path down towards the beautiful Latheronwheel harbour. Cross an old stone bridge to reach the road, and then turn left up it. Go up the hill and then - after a bench on the right but before reaching the houses - leave the road as it bends left, picking up a coastal path above the cliffs once more on the outside of the fenceline. There are wicket gates to pass through the next two fences, and then a pair of stiles at a fence corner to enable you to continue the walk now on the landward side of the cliff fence.



Stage 5

Pass through another wicket gate to reach more open grassland above the cliffs - with another fine sea stack. When a stone wall is reached there is a stile to cross, then the path veers left slightly to pass above the dense broom along the coastal fenceline. Continue to another fence corner very slightly inland, then look out for the marker post that indicates a diagonal line across to reach the far coastal corner of the next field. Just before reaching this a stile takes you back onto the coastal side of the clifftop fence. There is more boggy ground before passing through a gate above a deep ravine. Turn left to keep above the ravine until the route leads through another gate - on the far side it is straightforward to descend muddy ground to cross the bottom of the ravine and keep right up the far side. The walk runs along the stone wall above the ravine back towards the cliffs, then passes through a gate to keep on the field side, with more boggy ground.



Stage 6

A fence stile is immediately followed by one over a drystone wall; pass to the right of a curious old stone building and then reach a stile of sorts directly above a slab-like sea stack. Continue along the coastal side of what is now a clifftop wall. The route passes round the bay of Port an Muic and there are great views back along the coast towards Scaraben and [Morven](#), Caithness' highest hill. Cross a stile and then head slightly left down into a shallow ravine to reach and cross a small footbridge. Head uphill from here, following a couple of marker posts.



Stage 7

There are now views across the next bay to the ruins of Forse Castle above the cliffs. Cross a stile to pass round above the bay. Continue just outside the clifftop fence until you reach a very steep slope down - perhaps 10 metres. Carefully descend this to an old grassy track. The track will then slowly take you back up left, reaching the clifftop level at the ruins of Forse Castle. Bear right (marker post) when back at the clifftop level near the castle. The castle dates back to 1200 and was abandoned around 1660; the ruins are in a dangerous state. Bear left to continue the clifftop walk, crossing another stile.



Stage 8

Cross another stile and continue the clifftop walk until the deep ravine at Achastle Shore, with the stone ruins of the old herring fishing station far below. Carefully head down the very steep grassy ridge to reach the shore, and cross the burn to reach the ruins. Head left alongside the massive nearside wall of the second of the buildings to pass round the back and up into a natural grassy cutting. Pass through this and then leave the main route to bear right to pass over a stile. The route now continues on the outside of the fences across rough, coarse grassland; there is only a faint, tussocky path, passing over another stile. Continue until a massive ladder stile is reached; cross this and continue across the smoother grassy field, with the fence on your right.



Stage 9

Another ladder stile gives access to the seat and information board at the Swiney Hill viewpoint. From here you get your first glimpse of Lybster harbour. Continue along outside the fence over occasionally boggy ground. Continue with a fence on your left, ignoring another ladder stile and keeping ahead onto a surfaced path. This passes a bench and heads downhill to reach the approach road to the harbour, which is well worth visiting with a detour to the right (it is also the site of the Waterlines Heritage Centre). Otherwise the route follows the road to the left, climbing uphill towards Lybster; you can fork left off Shore Road to short-cut on a path to the centre, or simply follow the road up to the junction with the main road in the village, in which case the shop and hotels are to the left.

Stage 11: Lybster to Whaligoe

Please see the note below the map at the bottom of this page.



Occumster Waterfall

7.4 miles | 11.9 km

This stage starts from the high street in Lybster and goes along the cliff tops most of the way. It passes a beautiful cascade of waterfalls and a needle-like sea stack before reaching the stunning hidden world that is Clyth Harbour. It then passes more waterfalls and there is a chance to see the remains of ancient sea access steps at The Haven. It ends at the stunning Whaligoe Steps and the excellent Whaligoe Cafe. Please note, if you are continuing on to the next stage, go round to the left of the cafe and follow the markers from there. Please do not go in the private garden gate below the cafe.

Status

Amber (partially marked). The eleventh stage of the JOGT is walkable by a fit walker. There are 2-4 barbed wire fences to cross depending on the exact route walked. There are two or three burns which may be leapt and there will be tall grass in summer. Most of the stage is marked.

Risks

Risk of falling when crossing burns. Risk of injury when crossing barbed wire. There is a risk of death from falling off cliffs along most of this stage.

Stage End Information

Whaligoe is a small community with the Whaligoe Cafe, the Whaligoe Steps historic feature. From the A99 look for a sign for the Cairn of Get but go the opposite way from the sign, toward the sea. The Cafe itself doesn't have a road-side sign. If coming from the south, look for a red van parked in a field just before the Cafe, marked "skip hire." Busses will pick up and drop off on the A99 near the Cafe. As Whaligoe currently has no accommodation, you could stay at Thrumster House, asking them to pick you up from the Whaligoe Cafe. Then resume the walk the next day from the Cafe. Alternatively, you could walk as far as Sarclet Harbour and then either walk the 3 extra km to Thrumster House or ask them to collect you from there.

! Update !

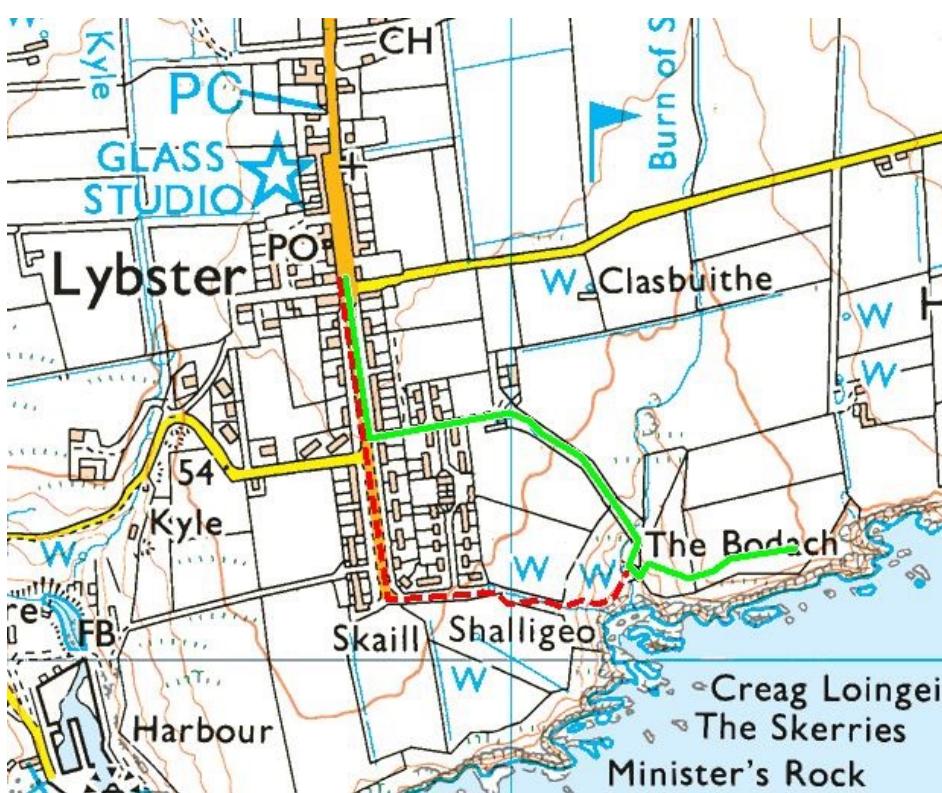
Shaligoe Steps

The steps down into Shaligoe at the start of Stage 11 are damaged and slippery, and recent rainfall has caused a landslip at the foot of them. Although still passable a good alternative start to the stage is available.

Turn down the main street as previously, but halfway down the row of houses on your right there is a road between two terraces. There is no street name, continue straight on past Golf View Drive and Golf View Place. Past the houses you will join a path that takes you down alongside a stream to steps down into Shaligoe. At the bottom of the steps there is a ruin, here you re-join the main route to climb up onto the coastal path.

Red : Official route of the Trail

Green : Alternative route avoiding landslip



Walk Description

Stage 1

From the shop on Lybster's Main Street continue towards the sea and follow the road as it curves to the left into South End. At the end take a rough path towards the coast, soon heading over a stile with great views of the sea stack and skerries below. Turn left to follow the fence rather than take the steep path down, soon crossing a small burn and turning right on the far side to head down a path with steps to a footbridge. Go over this and then go over a fence on a stile. Go up through the field, keeping to the right near the fence. Then cross a series of stiles to stay on the inside of the clifftop fence. Finally take a stile to go back outside the fence and continue.



Stage 2

At the mouth of the Clash of Mavesy the ruins of a tall building can be seen down on the shingle beach. Continue outside the fence; when you reach the fence corner, aim diagonally across the open hillside down to the burn to hop across at a narrow spot. Cross inside the fence at a narrow spot and ascend on a diagonal back toward the sea. Find another stile to get back outside the field and resume walking outside the fence. Continue all the way round the Occumster headland until the Occumster Burn is seen below. There is a footbridge above the upper waterfall; once over the bridge, continue back toward the sea to go over a stile over a boundary fence, staying outside the fields.



Stage 3

There are some impressive sea stacks, Roy Geo, and a natural arch on this section. Soon Clyth Harbour is reached with the remains of a large fishing station visible below. This would have been part of the herring fishing industry which boomed in the 19th century. After rounding the back of Clyth Harbour cross a stile over a fence to continue along the coast with the red and white striped Clyth Lighthouse soon coming into view. The grassy and rocky terrain can be hard going in places.



Stage 4

The lighthouse is privately owned so keep to the inland side of it, crossing another fence before reaching the fenced driveway for the lighthouse. Turn right down the driveway and cross a low fence to resume walking outside the clifftop fence. After a couple fields, a stile is there to let you in the field to go safely round Line Geo, then go back out on another stile to continue the walk. Stay outside for the length of a field or two until a gap in the fence naturally lets you continue inside across the sloping fields.



Stage 5

Continue on this line inside the fields and then start down toward another gap in the clifftop fence to go out near the cliff edge to see the impressive Stack of Mid-Clyth. Then continue outside the fences until you cross the neck of Halberry Head across dilapidated fences. Just after this, the cliff path is exposed and some may prefer to walk inside the fence for a distance.



Stage 6

Further on, cross a stile and then a bridge over the burn before Hanni Geo. The stay outside the next fenced field if there are cattle present. (There is often a bull!) Then cross another bridge and another stile to continue inside the next field. Follow the clifftop fence to a stile to go out and explore the muddy steps down into the Haven, or just follow the trail as it cuts across the field toward the top of Long Gote to find stiles to continue. Follow a path cut through the gorse along the fence line and continue into a clearing. Here you are close to the A9 with two churches over the road.



Stage 7

Continue across the croftland using a gate below the second church and then a second gate as you aim nearer to the coast eventually returning to the outside of the fence and passing Whale Geo. From here you can see the Whaligoe Cafe building. Aim for it, crossing a fence and burn before you reach it. Head to the right down the pathway to explore the Whaligoe Steps, an amazing feat of engineering. Over 330 stone steps lead down to what was once a thriving fishing port built in the mid 18th century. Fish (primarily herring but also haddock, ling and cod) were landed here, gutted and carried up the steps in creels by a small army of women and taken to market by foot in Wick. There was a cooperage at Whaligoe and barrels of salted herring were packed onto boats and exported from here.

Stage 12: Whaligoe to Wick



Sarclet Harbour
10.6 miles | 17.0 km

This stage starts from the excellent Whaligoe Cafe with access to the stunning Whaligoe Steps. (To start the walk heading north, go round to the left of the cafe and follow the markers from there. Please do not go in the private garden gate below the cafe.) It then goes along cliff tops, through farms small and grand, and passes a fascinating hole with a view straight down to the sea, to arrive at the pretty harbour of Sarclet. Then it reaches one of the most magnificent sea arches in Britain before passing several other lovely coastal features. After passing the ruins of Old Wick Castle, it finally ends in Wick.

Status

Green (mostly marked). The twelfth stage of the JOGT is walkable by a fit walker. There are no barbed wire fences to cross. The stage is marked from Whaligoe to within a mile of the Old Man of Wick Castle. Reaching the Old Man of Wick and then continuing into Wick is unmarked but straightforward.

Risks

There is a risk of death from falling off cliffs along most of this stage.

Stage End Information

Wick is a large town by Caithness standards. It is on the A99 and is well served by bus and rail. Buses arrive at the centrally located station near the Norseman Hotel. The train station is on Station Road. Take Station Road to the roundabout at Bridge Street to start the next stage. The town has a multitude of hotels and B&Bs, many of them near the centre, as well as a good selection of pubs and restaurants.

Walk Description

Stage 1

From the cafe at the top of the Whaligoe Steps, keep to the left of the cafe and walk between the cafe building and a barbed wire fence. Walk outside the fence over a small bridge over a burn, then over a second burn, and continue outside the fenced field. Cross a fence into another field and walk on the seaward side, soon a house and animal/chicken enclosures can be seen ahead on the left. Downhill from the house, pass outside the fence again and round the headland. There are excellent views a minute's walk further out. Continue on the seaward side of the fence round the back of Ellen's Geo. There is an impressive waterfall cascading down the cliffs of the high-sided geo.



Stage 2

Continue outside fence and cross a small open field on a diagonal on a faint track, crossing a small burn, to the next fence corner. Keep the ridge between you and the sea; follow an indistinct and sometimes-muddy ancient track northwards toward a tall post. Just after the post, enjoy the view ahead from the high ground, then find your way down a steep slope, turn right, and follow the fence round beside the sea. As the fence turns inland, head downhill to cross a burn and then follow a track cut through whins and then though heather. Cross a stile and stay outside fenced field along clifftops with excellent views. Note the ornate mausoleum inland on the left.



Stage 3

At the corner of the field go through a gate and follow a faint grassy track across a slope and then down to cross Mill Burn (a bridge is planned here) and continue up a steep slope to the high ground. From here walk north along the coast on tussocky open ground, looking out for an impressive arch and separate blow hole.



Stage 4

The cliffs are not as high now but remain equally impressive with lots of sea features as you make your way across the rough ground keeping close to the cliff tops. It is necessary to head inland around Turrie Geo with views again to Loch Sarclet and then continue on the cliff tops to pass Sarclet Head. As you approach Sarclet harbour, known as The Haven, look out for a small

waymarker which indicates where a narrow path descends diagonally down to the harbour - it may look daunting initially but it does widen and is soundly made. There is the remains of a fishing station and the sea here is popular with seals.



Stage 5

Climb up the path on the far side and continue past The Stack and stay on the seaward side of the fence eventually rounding the deep Riera Geo where you may prefer the inland side of the fence where you can also cross a burn more easily. A pallet gate deals with the next fence and then continue on the outside of the fence. The going gets a little tougher on rough, grassy ground and then easier open ground with occasional white waymarkers and a gate through a fence at one place.



Stage 6

After Broad Geo the route passes the back of Tod's Gote. Ensure you don't shortcut the next grassy promontory on the south side of Ashy Geo as it gives a superb view to the Needle Eye Rock - one of Britain's most spectacular natural arches. Soon afterwards there's a sea cave. Stay close to the cliff tops, eventually reaching Ires Geo after a ruined house. There is a boggy section of track at the back of the deep inlet. Follow this to round the back of it, looking down as there are usually seals hauled out at low tide, they may have pups in the late autumn/early winter. Go over a stile to continue on a path.



Stage 7

Stay close to the cliff tops passing Helman Head and a couple of stacks and using the waymarkers to find a stile over a wall and continuing on the seaward side of the fence. It is necessary to head inland before the large South Stack, still staying on the cliff top around the back of Girston bay and then on beyond Dunbar's Stack.



Stage 8

A long, narrow geo forces another inland foray, stay on the seaward side of the fence where a rough path is followed and soon the large Stack o'Brough comes into view. Cross a tiny footbridge and continue around the coast soon passing the sentry post for the military danger area. Soon the remains of the Castle of Old Wick come into view. After a kissing gate the ruins can be explored before continuing on the path which soon joins a surfaced lane. When this bends inland continue slightly right on the coastal path and soon reach the other sentry post at the kissing gate and small car park.



Stage 9

From here follow the tarmacked road along the coast, noting the old tidal seawater swimming pool. Just before the large house turn right onto the path signed South Head Quarries Path and follow it down steps and then alongside the road towards Wick harbour. Pass the old lifeboat station and keep left off the road before following the road past a series of fishing boat huts and the old herring market. Stay by the river, then cross Wick Harbour Bridge. This leads to Wick town centre and the end of the stage.

Stage 13: Wick to Keiss



Sinclair Girnigoe Castle
12.5 miles | 20.0 km

This stage starts in the centre of Wick and goes along roads for 3 km before setting out along the cliff tops again. You'll soon come to Noss Head lighthouse, then Sinclair Girnigoe Castle, and then the lovely hotel called Ackergill Tower. After that you'll walk along a ridge of sand dunes, cross a large river, and then walk more dunes before arriving at Keiss.

Status

Green (partially marked). The thirteenth stage of the JOGT is entirely walkable by a fit walker. All fences and walls have gates or stiles. The dunes by Wick Golf Club at Reiss are not marked and it may be easier to walk on the beach except at high tide. (Please do not walk along the golf course.) The River of Wester north of Reiss is usually fordable by most adults, but not always. It can be as much as 3 ft deep or more at high tide, but is usually much less. In winter it has been reported to be much deeper on occasion due to erosion of the beach. Under these conditions it may be waist or chest deep or more and should not be crossed; walk to the A9 bridge instead. There are about 6 miles of the route marked from just north of Staxigoe to Wick Golf Club at Reiss.

Risks

Risk of drowning in River of Wester or being swept out to sea at exceptional high tide and/or river in spate. There is a risk of death from falling off cliffs along some of this stage.

Stage End Information

Keiss is on the A99 north of Wick. Numerous bus routes stop there, connecting to John O'Groats, Wick, and Inverness. From Keiss, walk down the high street to where it curves left to follow the cliff top. Keiss has the Sinclair Bay Hotel (seasonal) and several nearby B&Bs.

Walk Description

Stage 1

Begin by walking east along the short pedestrianised section of Wick High Street. Turn left uphill up Shore Lane, and then take the second right onto Willowbank - signed for Papigoe, Staxigoe and Noss at each junction. Keep straight ahead, passing the school and reaching the edge of Wick; keep left on the main road when it forks. The road now leads into Papigoe, keep straight ahead and round a bend to the left until the road reaches a t-junction in Staxigoe. Turn right here, passing the harbour; and keep along the lane towards Field of Noss farm.



Stage 2

At the farm keep on the track passing left of the farmhouse and into the farmyard. Fork right across this onto a track that reaches the coast. Now simply keep heading along by the coast. Stiles gives access to the outside of the fence right above the cliffs, but the walking here is rough and requires care - it's easier to keep on the inland side of the fence, though this means having to cross a fence further on. After the two options rejoin the route continues along the more open, rugged coastline. There are several geos (inlets) to round and some small sea stacks; the lighthouse on Noss Head is visible in the distance ahead.



Stage 3

When you can see a large wall barring the route, follow the path that heads diagonally inland - aiming a little left of the lighthouse - to reach a gate in the wall. Pass through this and then continue across the next field to reach a gate in the fence around 100m south of the lighthouse complex. Go through this and straight across the tarred access road to pass through a gate on the other side. Aim left of the lochan - with the best view of Noss Head lighthouse - to reach a stile / makeshift gate in the next stone wall.



Stage 4

The route is now along the coastal cliffs once more, passing the back of two deep geos before reaching a track, and turning right along this to reach the ruins of Castle Sinclair Girnigoe. The first castle here was started in the 1300s but today's ruins date mostly from the 17th century. Access is across a spectacular footbridge but the castle itself is currently closed pending restoration. Head up opposite the drawbridge to continue the coastal walk on the seaward side of the fence.



Stage 5

There is a stile where the route crosses a fence, and then continues now between a stone wall and the clifftops, with some fine sea stacks below. The going is often overgrown with long, tussocky grasses on this section. There are great views along the coast around Sinclair's Bay with Ackergill Tower prominent, whereas looking down there is a natural arch at one point. At a collapsed section of cliff the walk crosses to the inland side of the wall, before again continuing on the seaward side just beyond. Then, at the next geo, the route goes through two gates to head into a now open field usually with grazing livestock. This section can be muddy in places; you can either keep above or below the now low grassy cliffs, topped with a WW2 gun emplacement.



Stage 6

Eventually the route reaches a jetty at Ackergill Shore. Turn left up the road here, passing the houses, and then turn right on the nearside of a massive stone wall. Pass through the playground and through the gate opposite, continuing through a field to reach and pass through another gate onto a track. Turn right along the grassy track - with whalebones built into the wall - to pass to the right of a house. The massive wall beyond encloses Ackergill Tower, which is passed on the seaward side. The tower was built in the 15th century; it was formerly a hotel but is currently closed.



Stage 7

The route crosses to the inland side of the wall at a massive stile, before crossing back again further on. Soon you reach a lane: go right to go outside the fence and along the low dunes through grasses. Alternatively you can walk along the vast sands of Sinclair's Bay (not possible at high tide). If walking the dunes, when you reach the corner of the fence, turn inland to a car park but then keep right and right again to resume walking the dunes. Extending north of the car park is Wick Golf Course. If walking the dunes, the path descends to a burn crossing. Please do not walk onto the golf course to use the bridge as there is the danger of being injured by golf play from the nearby tee. From the burn, climb up to the right of a tee to rejoin the path along top of the dunes - which then climb so high as to give a slight feeling of exposure! Eventually the dune single dune ridge becomes more complex and hard to follow. The best option is to walk on the beach from here except at the highest tide conditions.



Stage 8

Whether you are walking the dunes or the beach, the potentially serious obstacle of the River of Wester is eventually reached. At low tide and in a dry spell it can be easily paddled at a little above ankle depth, but at high tide and in spate it can become completely impassable (reportedly chest-deep on occasion). If it is impassable, it will be necessary to make an awkward detour, doubling back on the other side of the dunes and then crossing the golf course with care, aiming for a gate at ND334573; a lane then leads to the busy A99, the verge of which can be followed northwards for over 1km to cross the bridge. You can then turn right at 'Sub Sea 7', going left at the security gates to eventually return to the beach. If you do cross the river, you can simply walk along the beach, crossing the two piers where deep sea pipelines are moved out to sea. If you arrive on a rare day when this is in progress, make a worker on the beach aware of your presence and they will help you to pass safely.



Stage 9

Continue along the beach until rows of old concrete tank traps are reached; bear left to pick up a path alongside a row of these to reach a parking area. From here follow the grassy track beside the coastline, passing some houses. Follow the track when it turns left just before a bungalow, then turn right through a pedestrian gate just beyond the garden to follow a path up to the village of Keiss. The hotel is along the road to the left; the old harbour is to the right.

Stage 14: Keiss to John o' Groats



Stacks of Duncansby
13.6 miles | 22.1 km

From Keiss the walk is mostly along cliff tops with particularly beautiful walking between Samuel's Geo and Bucholly Castle. Then Ness Head provides a sweeping view of Freswick Bay and previews the next few miles. After Skirza Head the walk becomes largely a stroll (though sometimes a boggy one), taking in the beautiful Stacks of Duncansby and then Duncansby Head lighthouse.

Status

Green (occasionally marked). The fourteenth stage of the JOGT is walkable by a fit walker. There are a couple barbed wire fences and one or two gates to climb across. Only some small bits of the stage are marked. From the road end at Skirza Head to JOG, the trail is often walked and is a lovely stroll. The most difficult sections are approaching Freswick from the south and at Skirza Head, both of which become overgrown July-September.

Risks

Risk of injury on barbed wire. There is a risk of death from falling off cliffs along most of this stage.

Stage End Information

John o' Groats is at the end of a minor road and is served by buses from Thurso, Gills Bay, and connecting through Wick to Inverness. Beware that not all busses stop by the main car park in John O'Groats (at the bottom of the hill near the visitor centre). Some busses that come from Gills Bay only stop up the hill at the junction of the A99 and the A836, in front of the Seaview Hotel. There is also ferry service to the Orkneys from John o' Groats.

! Update !

Freswick and Skirza Harbour

Owing to landowner concerns about the safety of the cliff and beach route between Freswick and Skirza Harbour, the route between GR ND378677 and ND386680 is temporarily closed. Please use the Skirza road: Northbound following the track to the road before turning east for approx. 1km until signs for the Harbour, once at the harbour rejoin the coastal route. Southbound, at Skirza Harbour follow the road until a T junction, turn west and continue for approx. 1km until a track with a green Path sign, follow this to the beach and rejoin the Trail here.

Walk Description

Stage 1

In Keiss walk along the road towards the sea, continuing as the road turns left to head down towards the harbour. As the road bends back to the right take the coastal path to the left (you may want to detour to visit the harbour first), otherwise continue over short turf soon passing a WWII pill box. The ruins of the 17th century, clifftop Keiss castle can be seen ahead, the large white building on the left is Keiss House built to replace the castle in 1755.



Stage 2

Follow the coastal path and when it dips at a farm gate go through this to follow the inland side of the fence past the castle - the ruins are in a dangerous state and there is no access to the building. At the field corner go through the walker's gate and continue along the coast. The route follows the cliff top crossing stiles over a wall and a fence. Stay on the seaward side of the field fence, climbing one fence and then a caithness slab field boundary, and passing a couple of geos. The prominent square Mervyn Tower was built as a monument to Sir Francis Tress Barry, an English businessman and politician who excavated the Nybster broch in 1900. The irony is that the monument partially hides the iron-age broch which is on the seaward side and is well worth a look. From here a constructed path leads to a carpark at Nymbster passing a small sandy beach and a jetty.



Stage 3

Don't enter the car park, instead keeping to the seaward side of the coastal fence. Pass round some geos, and continue along the coast. When a bungalow at Milltown is in view off to the left, bear half left (still well right of the bungalow) to reach a stone bridge over the burn. Cross this, and then resume along the clifftops, passing a stone building and keeping right of the fence. When Samuel's Geo is reached pass around it, noting (but not following) the steps down into the inlet. Further on is a fine sea stack, and a view down through an arch to the sea. Eventually the ruins of Bucholly Castle are seen ahead, perched dramatically on a rock headland. Continuing along the clifftops, the route crosses a stile over a fence.



Stage 4

Soon another fine sea stack is passed, and then a headland barred by a stone wall. Continue, crossing a stile and staying outside the fence until the barns at Freswick Mains are reached - immediately before Freswick Castle. The going here is rough and requires care, but it should be possible to continue outside the fence until the barns and then cross a footbridge over the burn emerging from them. Continue ahead past Freswick Castle to cross a much larger burn on stepping stones or on the beach. If the burn is impassable, go left round the castle to go through a wooden gate to use the bridge then fork right in the next field to pass through a gate giving access back to the sandy beach of Freswick Bay. Cross the beach; at the far end head up past some tank traps to reach the end of a lane. Go over a stile to enter the grassy coastal field.



Stage 5

Leave the field again via a stile, resuming walking outside the fence. When you see a small set of steps down to the beach, take this and walk along the bouldery beach for 100 yards or so - this may be a problem at highest tide. Continue on the beach until you see a trail marker on the shore by a stone bench. Ascend past the bench, turning right at the top to reach a tarmac road. Turn right down this to reach a jetty. From here continue along the coast, now on the outside of the field fences. The grass is tussocky at times but not impassable; the route eventually gains height and crosses a small burn before continuing above the cliffs of Skirza Head. The next section is a little convoluted, passing round the back of Rushy Geo and then the well-named Long Geo. When the fence is reached at the back of Long Geo turn right to cross the top of the geo and continue outside the fences.



Stage 6

This soon leads to a former Caithness flagstone quarry. At the bottom of the slope cross the flat area head slightly diagonally left towards the coast and then head left to follow the coastline. For the first section the ground is very uneven and boggy, it does improve after passing Skippie Geo and a faint path can soon be picked up running along the cliff edge. There are a number of streams running down to the cliff edge and these can be very boggy, keep well inland from the cliff edge. The major first cliff feature to be reached is Wife Geo where a large stack has been left standing in an inlet where water rushes through two long natural arches.



Stage 7

After passing this go through a gap in some fence posts and keep following the faint path as you head north. Pass through two more gaps in the fence as the path improves and soon the first sight of Duncansby Stacks come into view. At times there is a fence on the cliff side. The lighthouse at [Duncansby Head](#) can also now be seen. The path improves and there are impressive views of the two large stacks and natural arch beyond - perhaps the true climax of the John o' Groats Trail. The stacks, and the more sheltered sections of cliff, are alive with seabirds during the nesting season. Follow the fence to a kissing gate and go through it and continue along the path next to the fence.



Stage 8

Head downhill to cross a plank bridge and keep following the wide path. A short cut path heads across to the left, or you can continue along the cliff top to view the stacks and the Geo of Sclaithes before following the path to the car park at Duncansby Head. The lighthouse was built by the famous Stevenson family of lighthouse builders. Turn left down the road for around 200m before forking right to pass round the back of the Glupe, a great blow-hole and natural arch. From here keep well away from the cliff edge, aiming for a stile in a fence and then descending to reach the Bay of Sannick.



Stage 9

Cross the burn at the bottom. The way continues across the short-cropped turf that gives mostly excellent walking with only the odd boggy patch, soon reaching the Ness of Duncansby. There is an information board here and a seat, a good place to watch the tide race through the notorious Pentland Firth. Continue around the back of a bay of sand and seaweed, continuing on the grassy path until - as John o' Groats is approach - it descends to the pebbly shore. From here a cinder path continues to reach John o' Groats, with the jetty on your right and the famous sign on the grassy bank ahead. There's a cafe next to the former landmark hotel building for you to celebrate reaching journey's end.