

## **The turn of the tide**

A self-guided walk around the Killard peninsula in County Down



Explore the contrasting landscapes of Killard National Nature Reserve

Find out how ice and water have created different landforms

Look out for a variety of flora and fauna

Discover how humans have used the coastline and its resources

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**the stories of our landscapes  
discovered through walks**





This booklet is to be used alongside the audio commentary for this walk

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## The turn of the tide

### Discover the Killard peninsula where Strangford Lough opens into the Irish Sea

Sitting at the mouth of Strangford Lough, the Killard peninsula is a very special place with a unique geography.

This walk explores sandy bays and rocky foreshores, lush meadows and crumbling cliffs to discover how the forces of ice and water have created the stunning scenery that you see today.



Discover strangely-shaped rocks that were bent and contorted by powerful tectonic forces. Learn how the rounded hills scattered across the landscape were formed when an ice sheet melted rapidly. Explore a spectacular rock cleft called Gurgle Gurgle. See soft cliffs that are eroding away.



Find out what wildlife thrives at the mouth of the tidal lough. Discover how humans have used this coastline and its resources from ancient to modern times.

There is much to enjoy on this walk in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Nature Reserve and Area of Special Scientific Interest, including spectacular views of the Mourne Mountains.

Top: Mill Quarter Bay © Jenny Lunn  
Bottom: Stratified and contorted rock at Benderg Bay © Jenny Lunn

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## Practical information

<b>Location</b>	Killard National Nature Reserve, County Down, Northern Ireland
<b>Start and finish</b>	Mill Quarter Bay, Killard Road, Kilclief, Downpatrick BT30 7PQ
<b>Getting there</b>	<p><b>Car</b> - The entrance to Killard National Nature Reserve is at Mill Quarter Bay on Killard Road, which is a scenic loop road off the A2 between Strangford and Ardglass. There is a long layby for parking on the road.</p> <p><u>Coming from Strangford</u> on the A2 - Take the first left when you enter the village of Kilclief (Shore Road). Drive past Kilclief beaches and straight over at a crossroads (now Killard Road). The next beach you come to, after about one mile, is Mill Quarter Bay; the layby is on the left.</p> <p><u>Coming from Downpatrick</u> via Ballyhornan Road and Lismore Road - When you reach the T-junction with the A2, turn left signposted Strangford. Then turn immediately right signposted Ballyhornan (Killard Road). Drive through the village and alongside the long Ballyhornan beach cliffs. Mill Quarter Bay is the next beach you reach; the layby is on the right.</p> <p><u>Coming from Ardglass</u> on the A2 - Turn right at the signpost to Ballyhornan (Killard Road). Drive through the village and alongside the long Ballyhornan beach cliffs. Mill Quarter Bay is the next beach you reach; the layby is on the right.</p> <p>It is not possible to reach Killard by public transport.</p>
<b>Walk distance</b>	3 ½ miles
<b>Level</b>	<b>Moderate</b> – A fairly easy walk with one short steep climb (which can be avoided as required with loss of cliff-top views).
<b>Terrain</b>	Rural coastline including foreshore, grassy paths, rocks, sand and cliff-top path.
<b>Conditions</b>	The foreshore is rough and meadowland can be muddy.
<b>Best time to visit</b>	<p>The best time to go is at <b>low tide</b> when more of the rock formations are visible but there is still plenty to see at any time. Check tide times at <a href="http://www.tidetimes.org.uk/killard-point-tide-times">www.tidetimes.org.uk/killard-point-tide-times</a>.</p> <p>Birds are abundant all year round, but if you want to see the incredible varieties of butterflies and orchids then visit in the <b>summer months</b>.</p>

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### Suitable for

**Families** – Lots to see and explore; children will enjoy roaming around the beaches, rock pools and cliffs. Not suitable for wheelchairs or buggies.

**Dogs** – A wonderful landscape for dogs to run free and swim although they must be on leads for small sections of the route where livestock are in fields.

### Refreshments

**The Cable Bar** on the main road in Ballyhornan (a mile away) is the only nearby option for refreshments.

There are no tables or benches at Killard but nature kindly provides very soft meadowland and sand dunes perfect for picnicking.

### Toilets

There are no public toilets on or near the route.

The nearest facilities are at the Cable Bar in Ballyhornan (1 mile from start).

### Places to visit

The **coastal path** from Ballyhornan to Sheepland is recommended but is quite rocky in places. En route is **St Patrick's Well**, the ruins of **Sheepland** village and further evidence of glaciation.

**Ardglass** is a picturesque fishing village about 5 miles to the south. It has a castle and four medieval tower-houses.

**Castle Ward** is an eccentric 18th-century mansion owned by the National Trust about 5 miles to the north just outside the village of Strangford. The large estate comprises woodland, parkland and gardens with a variety of walking and cycling trails including along the shore of Strangford Lough. [www.nationaltrust.org.uk/castle-ward](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/castle-ward)

**Strangford Lough Ferry** runs across the narrowest point in the lough between the villages of Strangford and Portaferry. From mid-channel you can see the SeaGen turbine. Departures every 30 minutes. [www.nidirect.gov.uk/strangford-ferry-timetable](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/strangford-ferry-timetable)

### Tourist information

#### **Downpatrick Visitor Information Centre**

Inside the St Patrick's Centre, 53a Market Street, Downpatrick

Open all year round

Tel: 028 4461 2233

Email: [downpatrick.vic@downdc.gov.uk](mailto:downpatrick.vic@downdc.gov.uk)

Tel: (028) 4461 2233

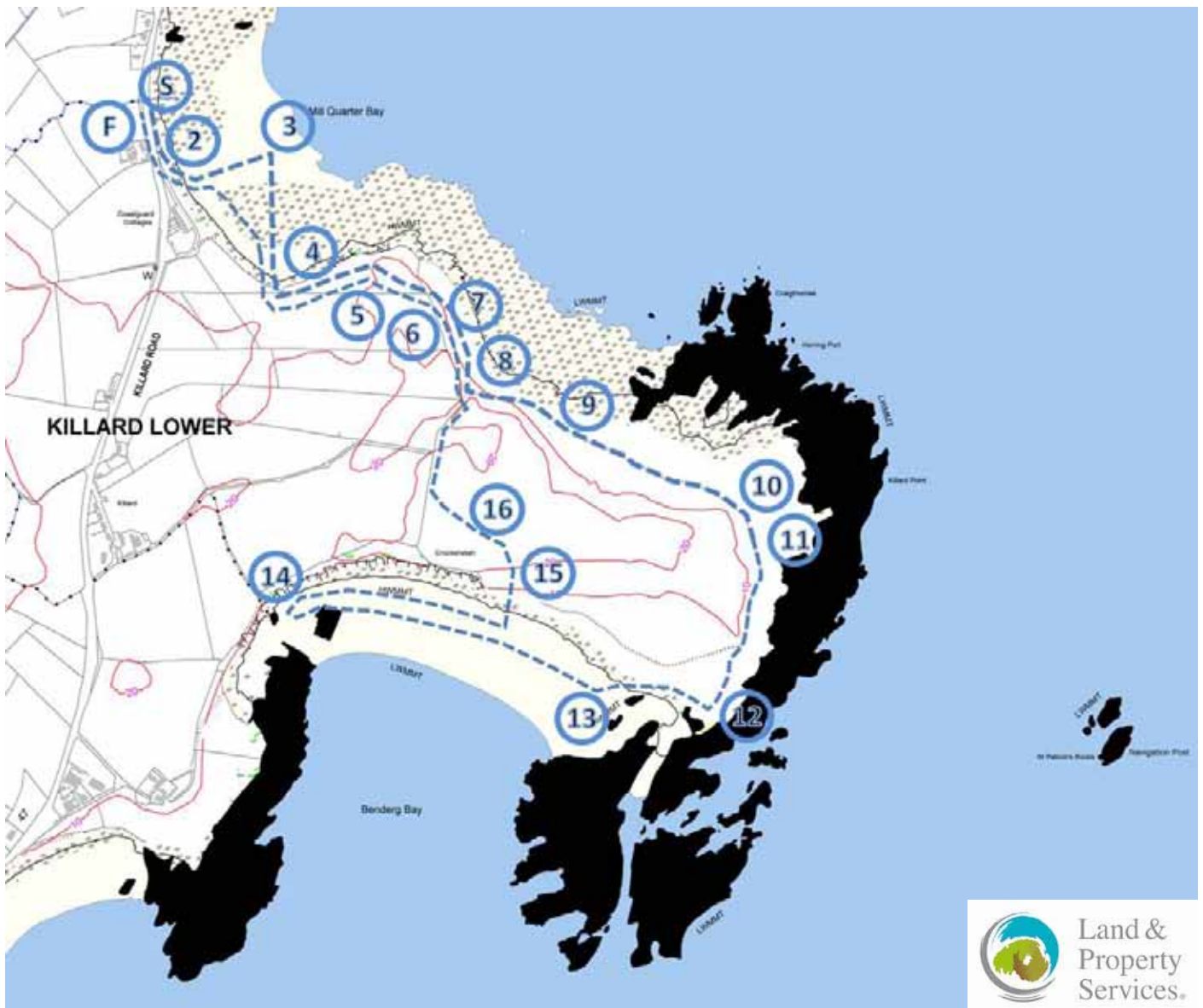
Visit Strangford Lough

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## Route map



### Stopping points

- |              |  |               |  |
|--------------|--|---------------|--|
| <b>Start</b> | Killard Road, Mill Quarter Bay                   | <b>9.</b>     | Rock outcrop on foreshore                        |
| <b>2.</b>    | Entrance to Mill Quarter Bay                     | <b>10.</b>    | Coastal path by St Patrick's Rocks               |
| <b>3.</b>    | Mill Quarter Bay foreshore                       | <b>11.</b>    | Rocks with lichen                                |
| <b>4.</b>    | Bottom of hill, end of Mill Quarter Bay          | <b>12.</b>    | Deep cleft in rocks                              |
| <b>5.</b>    | Cliff top, end of Mill Quarter Bay               | <b>13.</b>    | On the sand, eastern end of Benders Bay          |
| <b>6.</b>    | Top of hill looking back across Mill Quarter Bay | <b>14.</b>    | Bottom of the cliffs, western end of Benders Bay |
| <b>7.</b>    | Gate at entrance to Killard NNR                  | <b>15.</b>    | Top of cliffs above Benders Bay                  |
| <b>8.</b>    | Edge of meadowland                               | <b>16.</b>    | Pill box on cliff above Benders Bay              |
|              |  | <b>Finish</b> | Killard Road, Mill Quarter Bay                   |

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## Directions

Listen to each track then read the directions in the boxes below to get to the next stop

### 1. Welcome to the Killard peninsula

#### Killard Road overlooking Mill Quarter Bay

##### Directions 1

From the layby, walk along the roadside with the beach on your left to a break in the fence gives access to Mill Quarter Bay and Killard National Nature Reserve. This is opposite a bungalow and a sign clearly marks the entrance. Stay on the grass above the beach and look at the sweep of Mill Quarter Bay.

### 2. Harnessing tidal energy

#### Entrance to Mill Quarter Bay

##### Directions 2

Carefully clamber down the grassy slope onto the beach. If it is low tide, wander onto the foreshore and straight out towards the sea. If it is high tide, turn right (as you face the sea) along the pebbly remains of an eroded grass path and stop part way along.

### 3. Flying pick-its

#### Mill Quarter Bay foreshore

##### Directions 3

Walk towards the far end of Mill Quarter Bay. At the end is a wooden kissing gate. Go through and follow the stony path that runs alongside the fence. Stop when you reach the base of a small hill and look at the beach.

### 4. Boulders, pebbles, gravel and sand

#### Bottom of hill, end of Mill Quarter Bay

##### Directions 4

Walk up the small hill past the spiky gorse bushes (which are yellow when in flower). Follow the cliff edge, being very careful not to get too close to the crumbling edge. Do not let children run ahead here! Stop where you can see a section of the cliff that has broken away and is sliding down onto the foreshore.

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## **5. The hand that feeds also bites!**

### **Cliff top, end of Mill Quarter Bay**

#### **Directions 5**

Move away from the edge and walk to the top of the hill. If there are cows in the field, walk slowly around them being careful not to scare them. When you reach the highest point, turn and look back at the way you have come across Mill Quarter Bay.

## **6. Rolling hills**

### **Top of hill looking back across Mill Quarter Bay**

#### **Directions 6**

Continue following the grassy path down the hill to the wooden kissing gate into the Nature Reserve. Go through the gate and stop on the other side.

## **7. Sing for your supper!**

### **Gate at entrance to Killard National Nature Reserve**

#### **Directions 7**

Follow the path ahead which leads gently down. Stop when you get close to the shore.

## **8. Paradise on earth?**

### **Edge of meadowland**

#### **Directions 8**

Continue along the grassy path between the beach and sloping grassland. At the end of the first curve of the beach is a large gorse bush on the left. Immediately after, look just off the path onto the foreshore for large, flat grey rocks that have a series of parallel grooves.

## **9. How to bend rock**

### **Rock outcrop on foreshore**

#### **Directions 9**

Continue to follow the coastal path (or the foreshore if you prefer) until you come to the furthest point on the rocky headland of Killard Point. A short distance out to sea, you should be able to see a tall warning marker and, depending on the tide, the jagged rocks below. If it is at all wet, climbing the rocks on the shore is not advisable as they will be slippery.



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## 10. Shipwrecked!

### Coastal path by St Patrick's Rocks

#### Directions 10

Move towards some of the rocks with yellow growths on their surface. If it is windy you might want to move further inland or shelter behind a rock.

## 11. That yellow stuff

### Rocks with lichen

#### Directions 11

Continue along the coast path by the rocky coastline for a few hundred metres. Just after the next bay comes into view, and before the path and coastline bears right, is a large and deep crack (or cleft) in the rocks on the left known as Gurgle Gurgle.

## 12. Gurgle Gurgle

### Deep cleft in rocks

#### Directions 12

Continue to follow the coast path as it bears right towards the large sweep of beach ahead which is called Benderg Bay. When you reach the beach carefully step down the rocks on to the sand.

## 13. On the rebound

### Eastern end of Benderg Bay

#### Directions 13

Walk around the curve of the beach but not too close to the base of the cliffs or you may find yourself subject to bird droppings or cliff crumbles. Stop near the far end where the sand gives way to rocks and look at the cliffs.

## 14. Crumbling cliffs

### Bottom of the cliffs, western end of Benderg Bay

#### Directions 14

Retrace your steps back part way round the bay – if the tide is out you can cut across the sand. At the end of the higher section of cliff clamber up onto the grassy sand dunes. Turn left and follow the steep grassy path up to the top of the cliffs. Please be wary of the soft edges on these cliffs and do not let children wander off unsupervised.

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## 15. A working relationship

### Top of cliffs above Benderg Bay

#### Directions 15

With your back to the bay, head across the grassy plateau towards the nearest small square concrete building about 25 metres away, which is a former military pill box. Mind out for spiky gorse bushes on the way.

## 16. Run rabbit, run

### Pill box on cliff above Benderg Bay

#### Directions 16

Continue following the path across the grassy plateau in almost a straight line, crossing an old tarmac road and passing another pill box. This will take you back to the northern side of the peninsula. When you reach the top of the cliff, bear diagonally left down a path. This brings you back to the kissing gate where you entered the Nature Reserve. From here, retrace your steps over the small hill, along the stony path and through the gate onto Mill Quarter Bay. Follow the beach around to the parking area.

## 17. Time and tide

### Killard Road overlooking Mill Quarter Bay

#### Directions 17

This is the end of the walk.

## Credits

The RGS-IBG would like to thank the following people for their assistance in producing this Discovering Britain walk:

**Verity Peet** for creating the walk, taking photographs and providing the audio commentary

**Cathal** (Verity's son) for checking the walk's suitability for curious children!

**Jenny Lunn** for editing the walk resources, providing photographs and acting as narrator

**Howard Lunn** for testing the walk route and taking photographs

**Ian Enlander** for helpful feedback about the scientific aspects of the walk commentary

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**Albert Bridge, Ardfern, Fundy, Ian Kirk, Mike Pennington, Remi Jouan, Trista L Thornberry-Ehrlich, Wouldloper** and **Yummifruitbat** for additional images reproduced under the Creative Commons License

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