

THE BEACHES OF SCOTLAND

A SELECTED GUIDE TO OVER 150 OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL
BEACHES ON THE SCOTTISH MAINLAND AND ISLANDS

STACEY MCGOWAN HOLLOWAY

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First published in 2022 by Vertebrate Publishing.

VERTEBRATE PUBLISHING
Omega Court, 352 Cemetery Road, Sheffield S11 8FT, United Kingdom.
www.v-publishing.co.uk

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-83981-078-7 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-1-83981-079-4 (Ebook)

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Cartography by Richard Ross, Active Maps Ltd. www.activemaps.co.uk

Design by Jane Beagley, production by Cameron Bonser, Vertebrate Publishing.

Printed and bound in Europe by Latitude Press.

Vertebrate Publishing is committed to printing on paper from sustainable sources.

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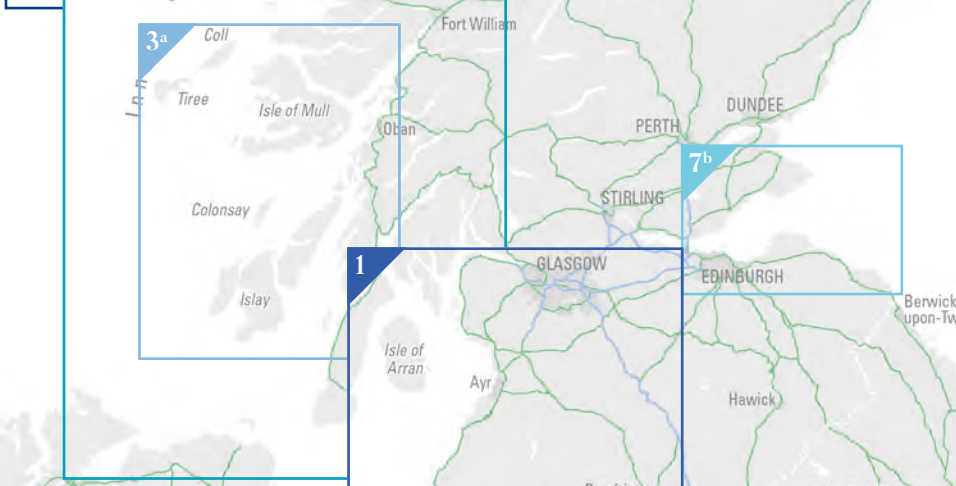
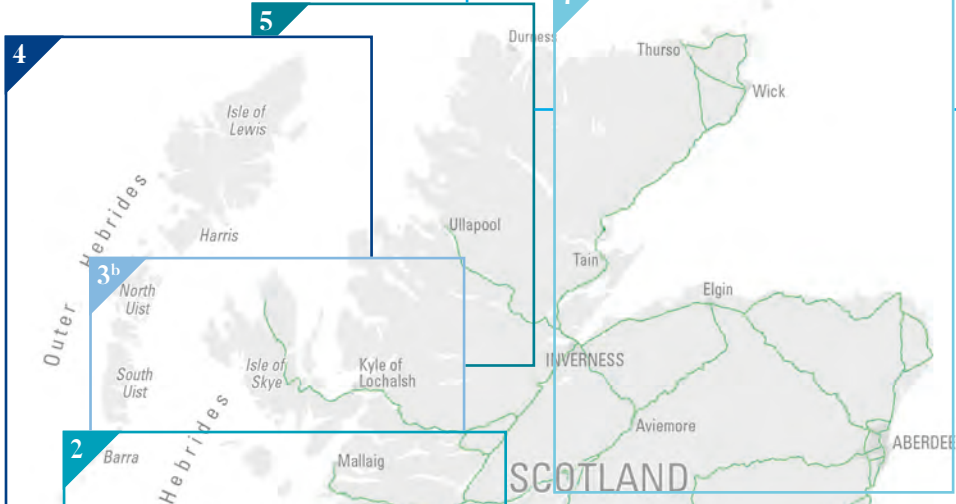
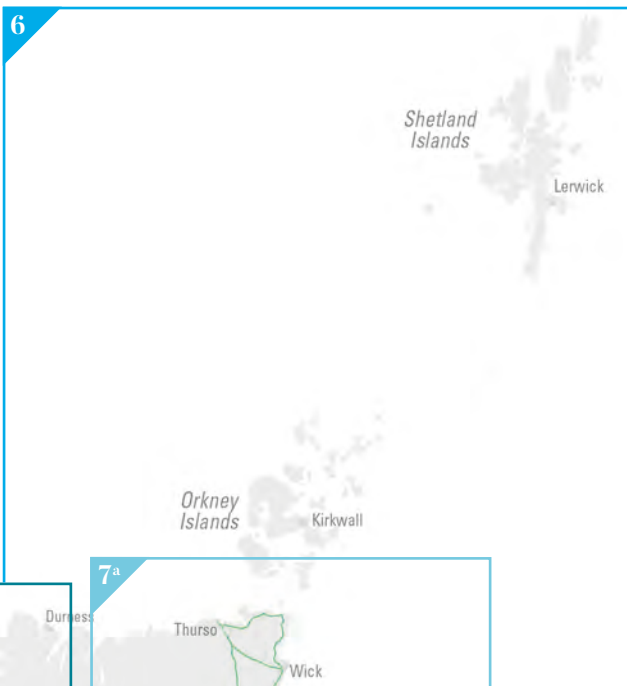
STACEY McGOWAN HOLLOWAY



Vertebrate Publishing, Sheffield
www.v-publishing.co.uk

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- 2 Argyll and Lochaber
- 3 Inner Hebrides
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Opposite David Balfour's Bay, Inner Hebrides

Introduction

When you hear the words 'beach holiday' it automatically conjures up images of lying on golden sands with the sun hot on your skin, relaxing to the sounds of gentle waves and swaying palm trees. Or maybe the quintessential British beach holiday of family-filled shores, ice cream cones and arcade games. However, on Scotland's beaches sunbathing will not be guaranteed!

So, why visit? One of the many answers is that whether they are viewed from the sheltered bulk of a Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac) ferry as it lumbers out of Ullapool, while glimpsing through a rain-splattered windscreen driving on single-track roads along the Ardnamurchan peninsula or on foot while staring out at the Atlantic Ocean from Balevullin Beach (p63) on Tiree (*Tìriodh*), the coasts of Scotland are powerful and breathtakingly beautiful. When visiting its beaches you are connected to this land in a way that feels both familiar and foreign. There is something almost forgotten about yourself that you are reminded of when you take the effort to reach these remote parts of Britain, these spaces that feel like the edge of the world.

Another reason to visit is that these beaches are truly wild. Whether you want to surf, snorkel, kayak, camp, swim on the open water or just wander peacefully along, these coastlines offer a true escape. Visiting these beaches allows you

to have fun, to let your hair fill with salt and your skin be lashed by windblown sand, to enjoy a sunset with family and friends or play in these natural playparks with your children. Here you can forget a world of work and leave responsibilities and worries far behind. Instead, you will be left exhausted and exhilarated, or tranquil and peaceful, in a place where often it is just you, the water and the odd curious seal for a witness.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who provided photos of the beaches, local information and knowledge, including Colin S Macleod (www.hebseaswimmer.com), Kristin Main, John Phelan, Georgie Gibbon, Emily Woolard (www.tartanroad.co.uk), Eilidh Carr (www.coralbox.ecwid.com), Mahalia Scott, Kathie Griffiths, Duncan Griffiths (www.northuistbunkhouse.co.uk), Louise Reed, Charlotte Small, Alastair McGowan, Paul Webster (www.walkhighlands.co.uk), Douglas Wilcox and Max Holloway. This book could not have become a reality without the detailed editorial work of Jessica McElhattan.

I would also like to thank my family and in particular my husband, Max Holloway, for their never-ending support.

Easy to reach and even easier to explore, the south-west coast of Scotland is within a short drive of the Borders to the south and Glasgow to the north, and even by public transport you can be on the beach of a remote island within a few hours. The 320 kilometres of stunning coastline in the south-west are the beaches of this author's childhood, and comprise seaside towns, kilometres of sandy shores and island life. In addition, if you're looking for a beach road trip, the South West Coastal 300 route is a perfect choice.

The beaches along the south-west coast are much more urban than many others in Scotland, and as such the water quality is not rated as highly as in the north and far west. However, many of the waters along these beaches are monitored by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), and the more popular beaches are provided with a daily water quality rating, meaning they are still of a good water quality for bathing and swimming.

SOUTH- WEST COAST









Isle of Arran
Pirnmill
Brodick
Lamlash
Blackwaterfoot

Irvine Beach

Troon Beach

Ayr Beach

Maidens
Turnberry

Girvan

Luce Sands

Rockcliffe

Irish Sea

Luce Bay

Solway Firth



0 20km

1 Irvine

Dumfries and Galloway

Do not be tempted to overlook the Scottish Lowlands – those who do will miss a beautiful part of the country. Here you will find an undulating coastline of rocky shorelines and sandy beaches, designated Special Areas of Conservation and protected nature reserves. This area is particularly attractive to cyclists, with forest mountain bike trails, great gravel bike routes or planned cycle tours along the South West Coastal 300 all available to take in the beaches. Water sport enthusiasts will not be short of places to sail, kayak and windsurf.

How to visit

BY LAND There are good road links from the Borders and from Glasgow on the A74(M) and M74. If travelling by bike, there are plenty of cycle tour operators in this area, or it is a great place to check out some coastal woodland bike tracks.

There are direct trains from Glasgow to Stranraer. Services from Carlisle to Dumfries also run.

BY SEA There is a direct ferry from Belfast to Cairnryan, just north of Stranraer.



Rockcliffe

REGION **Dumfries and Galloway** LAT/LONG **54.868, -3.807** GRID REF **NX 848535** BEACH FACES **South-west**
ACTIVITIES **Walking, spotting the wildlife, exploring the nature reserve, visiting Rough Island**



Often described as one of Scotland's most beautiful coastlines, Rockcliffe's beach is based along the Solway Firth and part of a National Scenic Area and is a National Trust for Scotland nature reserve. Take a meander along the three-kilometre stretch of beach and coastal trails between Kippford and Rockcliffe to see wild flowers, woodlands and meadows. It is best to visit on a low tide, where the shallow beach

stretches out almost a kilometre and a half.

Lying just off the coast, there is a bird sanctuary on Rough Island that can be reached on foot at low tide, except during May and June when the birds own the island.

Access

Rockcliffe is signposted off the A710. There is a car park and public toilets in the village.

Luce Sands

REGION **Stranraer** LAT/LONG **54.815, -4.953** GRID REF **NX 113523** BEACH FACES **South-east**
ACTIVITIES **Surfing, windsurfing, kitesurfing**



Luce Sands, also known as Sandhead, is thought by many to be the finest beach in the Stranraer area, and it is designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) due to its dune, seashore and seabed habitats. The beach is ten kilometres long, and at low tide it can extend far out into the bay. The bay is also very popular with surfers and windsurfers and is claimed to be the ultimate kitesurfing location on the south-west coast: the shallow, warm waters and abundance of space make it a great location for beginners.

Access

Beach access is from the Sand of Luce Holiday Park campsite.



Ayrshire

These west-facing beaches along the south-west mainland coast are the places to go for spectacular sunsets, long expanses of sand, wild swimming, family days out and stunning walks. Many lie close to townships and all are within easy access of Glasgow, meaning these beaches allow day trips away from busy life, and fleeting escapes from the city.

Ayrshire is a great location for culture, seafood and sailing, and is the birthplace of Scotland's National Bard, Robert Burns. Why not have a winter beach break and visit in January to celebrate Burns Night?

How to visit

BY LAND There are good road links from the Borders up the coast to Largs, along the A76 and A78. There are direct trains from Glasgow to and from Irvine, Ayr and Largs.

BY SEA There are ferry links from Dunoon to Gourock and Wemyss Bay to Rothesay.

Girvan

REGION **Ayrshire** LAT/LONG **55.242, -4.862**
 GRID REF **NX 180980** BEACH FACES **West**
 ACTIVITIES **Bathing, walking, taking a dip in the pool, running around a playpark**



Girvan is one of Ayrshire's most popular beaches, and the eponymous town offers a variety of traditional seaside activities, including an amusement centre and fish and chip shop just behind the beach. Like many on Ayrshire's coast, this beach is a wide, long, sandy arc, and the area is part of the UNESCO Biosphere in recognition of its abundance of wildlife and the landscape. Towards the north end of the beach

is a small harbour and pier, and there is also a bench-lined promenade, playpark and outdoor paddling pool.

The spectacular island of Ailsa Craig, which is now a bird reserve, lies opposite the beach. The island's unique granite means that it is perfect for making curling stones; nearly all of the curling stones for the Winter Olympics and Winter Paralympics are from Ailsa Craig.

Access

Girvan railway station is just under half a kilometre from the beach, which offers direct rail services to Glasgow. There is a large car park at the harbour with public toilets.

Turnberry

REGION **Ayrshire** LAT/LONG **55.309, -4.838**
 GRID REF **NS 198055** BEACH FACES **West**
 ACTIVITIES **Walking, golfing**

Turnberry's wide, sandy beach is backed by the famous Ailsa course at Trump Turnberry luxury hotel, a regular course on the Open Championships. It is worth walking up to see Trump Turnberry Luxury Collection Resort (as in Donald Trump), which is a stunning building. To the north of the beach it is possible to walk to Turnberry Lighthouse, which is now converted into a suite of the Trump Turnberry. The lighthouse is built on the site of Turnberry Castle, the alleged birthplace of Robert the Bruce.

While being an excellent place for golfers, this area is also very popular for walkers, with the Ayrshire Coastal Path passing the beach.

Access

Parking can be found on the A719 in the village of Turnberry, close to the beach.

1 Girvan 2 Turnberry © Shutterstock/scruffylookingnerfherder 3 Maidens

Maidens

REGION **Ayrshire** LAT/LONG **55.335, -4.816**
 GRID REF **NS 214083** BEACH FACES **North-west**
 ACTIVITIES **Walking, discovering Ayrshire's history**



Maidens is a quiet and peaceful beach, with a harbour to the south end which has small sea stacks leading out into the ocean.

The beach is a mix of sand and rocks and a

popular spot for walking, especially as the start point to walk round the grounds of Culzean Castle and country park – there is even a beach within the grounds named after the castle. You may need to purchase a ticket to enter the gardens and castle.

Access

Bus services to the town of Maidens run regularly from Ayr. There is a car park off Harbour Road at the southern end of the beach, with public toilets nearby.



1



2



3

Ayr Beach

REGION **Ayrshire** LAT/LONG **55.458, -4.642**
 GRID REF **NS 330220** BEACH FACES **West**
 ACTIVITIES **Bathing, cycling, enjoying a picnic,
 enjoying the putting green or crazy golf**



Located in the bustling town of Ayr, this mostly sandy beach stretches several kilometres and has beautiful views over Arran. The beach, which was bestowed with a Seaside Award from Keep Scotland Beautiful, is lined by a kilometre-and-a-half-long promenade which offers plenty to do, including gardens, a children's playpark and a boardwalk. Also on the seafront is Pirate Pete's Family Entertainment Centre with indoor soft play, mini golf and laser games. Alternatively, the Ayr seafront is part of Sustrans' NCN Route 7, and is a great location to cycle.

Access

The beach is signposted from Ayr town, where you will find good public transport links via Ayr railway station and Ayr bus station. There is street-side parking and a large car park along the beachfront.

Troon Beach

REGION **Ayrshire** LAT/LONG **55.541, -4.662**
 GRID REF **NS 320306** BEACH FACES **South-west**
 ACTIVITIES **Bathing, walking, cycling, enjoying a
 picnic, golfing**



With an esplanade at its northern end and views across to Arran, it isn't difficult to see why this popular, sandy beach won a Scotland's Beach Award in 2021 from Keep Scotland Beautiful. Troon Beach has that bucket-and-spade, family beach feel to it, however the beach is wilder to the south where it backs on to the dunes of the

Royal Troon Golf Club. The water is shallow and great for a paddle, and along the back of the beach are paths for both cycling and walking.

Access

Troon railway station is 500 metres away. There is a car park with public toilets at the north end of the beach; the car park will fill up quickly.

Irvine

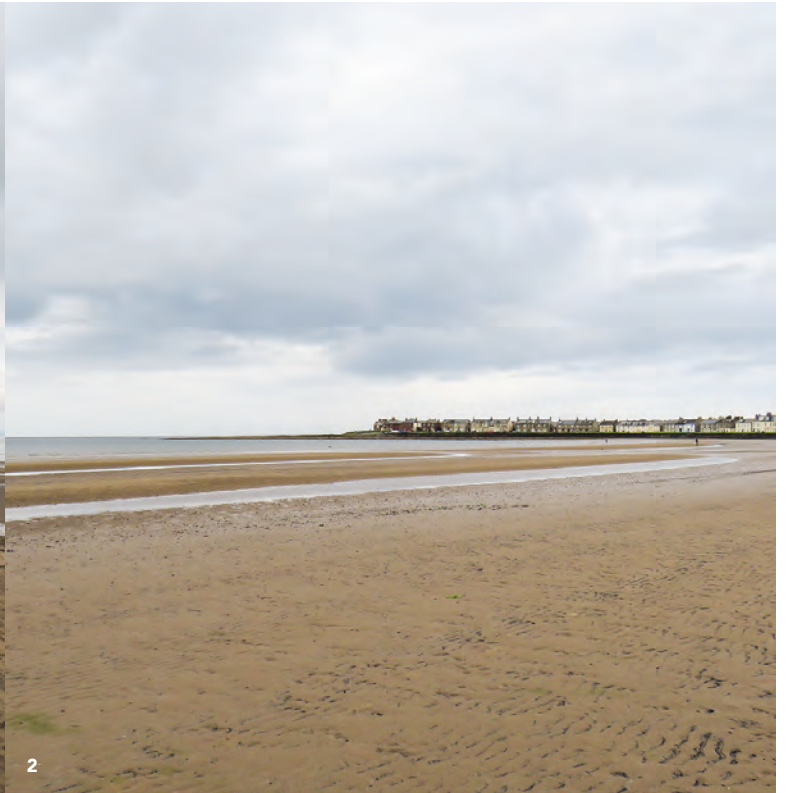
REGION **Ayrshire** LAT/LONG **55.604, -4.694**
 GRID REF **NS 304376** BEACH FACES **South-west**
 ACTIVITIES **Swimming, walking, enjoying a picnic,
 running round a playpark**



Irvine Beach is a beautiful, long stretch of sandy beach that reaches from Saltcoats in the north to Barassie Sands in the south. Irvine Beach is just south of the mouth of the River Irvine, and is very clean, with lots of bins and an electronic sign with daily water quality information for swimmers during the summer. The beach also boasts a lake and huge park behind it, making it a perfect place to come for a walk, a swim in the sea or a day out with the family. However, the beach highlight is the mighty Stone Dragon situated towards the south end of the park. A short walk from the car park, the dragon can be found perched high on the sand dunes overlooking the sea, and is said to be guarding the coastline from future Viking invasions – perfect for children to clamber over.

Access

Irvine railway station is a kilometre and a half away. By car, turn off from the A78 to the A71 towards Irvine, then head west through the town until you reach Beach Drive; there is a free car park at end of this road, with public toilets (by donation). From the beach car park there are steps or a slope down to the beach.





1 Lamlash 2 Brodick 3 Blackwaterfoot

Isle of Arran

Arran is a fantastic island to visit and is only a short ferry ride from the mainland. Known as 'Scotland in miniature', a visit to Arran allows you to enjoy a true Scottish experience in a small-island package. As well as fantastic road cycling, spectacular rock climbing and exhilarating hillwalking, the island also boasts several castles, gardens, local produce, distilleries and an abundance of wildlife. On top of all this, you are treated to a good selection of beaches and water-based activities, ranging from town-side bays on the west coast, which are perfect for ice cream and sandcastle building, to long stretches of white sands on the east with views out to Kintyre, Jura and the wide Atlantic Ocean. These beaches give you that feeling of getting away from it all, and throughout your visit the unique Arran skyline offers a stunning backdrop. Here you will even find a gin bar serving local gins on the beach!

How to visit

BY LAND The island is geared up for cycle tourers and there are good bus links available, with regular services between Brodick and Sannox.

BY SEA To reach Arran you can sail to Brodick from Ardrossan, which has a rail connection from Glasgow. If travelling from Kintyre there is a sailing to Brodick from Campbeltown. Alternatively, ferries run from Clanoig to Lochranza in the north of Arran – in summer this service sometimes departs from Tarbert, so check the timetables closely.

- **Top tip**
- Why not take the bus to Sannox (p15) and hike back over Goat Fell, the island's highest peak, via the airy ridgelines above Glen Sannox?

Brodict and Lamlash

REGION **Arran**

BRODICK

LAT/LONG **55.587, -5.154** GRID REF **NS 013371**

BEACH FACES **East**

LAMLASH

LAT/LONG **55.531, -5.128** GRID REF **NS 026307**

BEACH FACES **East**

ACTIVITIES **Bathing, walking, running around a playpark, enjoying a tipple at the gin bar, exploring the local towns**



Brodick and Lamlash are two wide, east-facing bays. Although not always the most picturesque beaches both are very convenient, especially for families, and when the sun is shining they can be glorious. Both are located at the edge of busy towns, meaning they are near a lot of hotels and bed and breakfasts, with large greens, playparks and shops metres from the beach – perfect for a day out with the family. To the far north end of Brodick, near to the castle, you will even find a gin bar on the beach, where you can sample gin made on the island and book tasting sessions.

Lamlash is a quieter village which provides a stunning view out to Holy Island on a sunny day. Holy Island is home to a Buddhist Centre for World Peace and Health, after the Virgin Mary reputedly persuaded the previous owner to sell the island in a dream. The rest of the island is a nature reserve. If you take a boat and visit the island, be sure to drink from the supposedly healing spring.

Access

Brodick is served by ferries from Ardrossan harbour in Ayrshire. Public car parks are available at both beaches with direct access to the beach.

Blackwaterfoot

REGION **Arran** LAT/LONG **55.504, -5.340**
 GRID REF **NR 891284** BEACH FACES **South-east**
 ACTIVITIES **Walking, spotting the wildlife, discovering Arran's history, golfing**

P **WC**

A large, long beach of sand and rocks, situated next to the small village of Blackwaterfoot. From the beach there is a coastal walk which passes the impressive Drumadoon Point, a breeding area for fulmar, jackdaw and kestrel. Divers and black guillemot can also be seen here.

Further along the coastal path you come to King's Cave. It is claimed that Robert the Bruce hid in this cave after his disastrous first year as King of Scots. Legend says that while waiting out the winter of 1306, he watched a spider on

the cave wall. Bruce took inspiration from the spider never giving up on spinning its web, and resolved to continue his campaign against the English. However, ancient carvings and Pictish symbols found on the walls suggest that Bruce wasn't the cave's first inhabitant. Using paths through the forestry, this can be made into a circular walk back to the beach.

Access

Regular buses stop at Blackwaterfoot from Brodick. This is a very accessible beach, with a small car park on the waterfront opposite the golf course.

Pirmill

REGION **Arran** LAT/LONG **55.643, -5.383**
 GRID REF **NR 871439** BEACH FACES **West**
 ACTIVITIES **Paddling, walking**

A long stretch of picturesque coastline along Arran's north-west coast, Pirmill's beach is a thin strip of pure-white sand and clear,



blue waters. There are several villages along this coast, including Catacol and Pirnmill.

Be aware that this coast often sees lion's mane jellyfish in the summer months, which can leave a nasty sting. You will often see them washed up along the beach.

Access

Regular buses stop at Pirnmill from Brodick and Blackwaterfoot. The A841 runs alongside the beach; there is very limited roadside parking.

Sannox

REGION **Arran** LAT/LONG **55.662, -5.153**
 GRID REF **NS 017454** BEACH FACES **East**
 ACTIVITIES **Bathing, hiking, walking, spotting
 the wildlife**



A family-friendly beach, with pretty, white sand mixed with colourful, smooth pebbles. Views to the east are across the water towards

mainland Scotland, but to the west the beach is overlooked by the domineering mountains of Glen Sannox and the corrie of the Devil's Punchbowl. The name Sannox comes from the Viking *sand-vik*, meaning sandy bay.

Starting from the beach is the Fallen Rocks Coastal Trail, a coastal walk taking you past the Fallen Rocks, giant sandstone boulders that fell in a landslide from the cliffs above. It leads you to a picnic site and spot to look for gannets, dolphins, porpoises and basking sharks. Across the road from the beach is also the start of hiking routes through Glen Sannox and, for the experienced hikers, routes up to the dramatic ridges on both sides of the glen.

Access

Regular buses stop at Sannox from Brodick. There is a small car park at Sannox with public toilet. From here, head down the path to the north of the car park where you can cross the river via large stepping stones and follow the path to the beach.

