




Walk 21: THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY

Distance: 7.3km/4.5mi;
2h20min

Grade: easy, with a climb of 160m/525ft overall. On a wet day, the path can be muddy in places.

Equipment: sturdy shoes, wind/waterproof jacket, water, picnic

How to get there:  172 (Ballycastle-Portrush bus) to the Giant's Causeway (The Nook). Or  to the car park and visitors' centre at the Giant's Causeway (the 101km/63mi-point on Car tour 13). There is an entrance fee.

To return:  172 from Dunseverick Castle; motorists alight from this bus at the

Giant's Causeway (The Nook), to pick up your car.

Short walk: Giant's Causeway circuit (2.9km/1.8mi; 55min. Easy. Equipment, access as above; return from the same place). Follow the main walk via The Organ to the Shepherd's Steps. Turn right at the top along the cliff-top path and follow it back to the visitors' centre. (Or shorten the walk even further, by taking the shuttle bus to the 15min-point.)

NB: The lower cliff path, which is still shown on some maps, is prone to landslides and *permanently closed* east of The Organ.

Associated with the legendary Finn MacCool, the Giant's Causeway is famous for its polygonal rock formations — nearly 40,000 columns of dark basalt jutting out into the sea. They were formed when volcanic lava erupted some 60 million years ago. As the lava cooled at a very steady rate, it solidified into crystalline columns— mostly hexagonal in shape. For more than 300 years, the Giant's Causeway has been a major tourist attraction, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1986. But even in August you can quickly escape the hordes of tourists from all over the world by following this scenic cliff-top walk.

To begin the walk, go from the bus stop or car park through the GIANT'S CAUSEWAY VISITORS' CENTRE and exit by the back doors. (If the centre is

closed, just walk round to the back of the building.) Walk down the asphalt road to the shore, ignoring the start of the cliff-top footpath up on your



The Giant's Causeway

right. Pass **Great Stookan**, a promontory on your left, and follow the road round **Port Ganny**, with sheer cliffs rising on your right. The road ends at the **Giant's Causeway** (15min; there is a shuttle bus from the visitors' centre to this point).

Explore the strange rock formations, with the **Grand Causeway** forming the biggest platform jutting out into the sea. Then continue from the turning circle through the **Giant's Gate**, a gap in the basalt columns. Follow the shoreline footpath round **Port Noffer**, past a large boulder known as the **Giant's Boot**. When you reach a junction, continue ahead for a moment, to see **The Organ** — vertical 'pipes' (basalt columns) on the cliff-face to your right (25min).

Now walk back to the junction and turn left up the **Shepherd's Steps**. Climb this flight of 162 steps, to emerge on the **CLIFF-TOP PATH** (40min). Turn left (*but turn right for the Short walk*) and follow it along the indented coastline, enjoying excellent views over the sequence of cliffs and bays. **Lacada Point** is the place where the Girona,

one of the galleons of the Spanish Armada, founded in 1588. The ship remained undisturbed until it was discovered in 1968; its salvaged treasure is now exhibited in the Ulster Museum, Belfast.

Proceed round the edge of more promontories with sheer cliff-faces, all made up of 'sandwich cake' layers — symmetrical rows of basalt columns divided by bands of red laterite. You have to cross the odd stile as you follow the gently undulating path. Go round **Benbane Head** (1h 30min), the most northerly promontory on the Antrim coast. Once you're past **Bengore Head**, the wide bay of **Portnabrock** begins to unfold.

The path undulates to the next promontory, **Contham Head**, beyond which **Port Moon** opens up, with its salmon fishery on the coast. Follow the coastal cliffs past **Portnagovna**, losing height gradually, until you meet the B146 opposite ruined **Dunseverick Castle**. The bus stops just where you leave the path (2h20min).

