

Caithness Riders Access Group



Dunnet

Maximum Distance : 8 miles Surface : Varied - Mainly sandy surfaces

The information contained in this pack is correct as of 16/08/2006

Dunnet Beach and Forest

Dunnet bay is one of the jewels in the crown of the beautiful county of Caithness! It boasts a truly lovely, broad sandy beach flanked by superb dunes supporting spiky marram grass- a rare and fragile habitat for the plants and animals that are able to thrive in this specialised environment. The waters and sands of the bay are home to some truly spectacular animals and birds, some of them seasonal while others may be seen all year round. You may be lucky enough to spot anything from seals, dolphins or whales to a Great Northern Diver, depending upon the time of year, but you can be sure that there will always be something of interest to see, so do keep your eyes wide while you ride!! More information can be obtained from the Ranger Visitor Centre, Dunnet Pavilion- the building that is beside the car park perched on top of the dunes, from where a careful, year-round watch is kept on all the wildlife activity in the bay. Dunnet Forest is located only a very short distance away from the beach on the far side of the road. It is accessed by a newly built, multi-use path that runs beside the road alongside the caravan park and this was constructed by Highland Council. At the end of the path you just need to cross the road and you are at the horse riders' entrance to the forest. Dunnet Forest is the most northerly community-managed forest on the U.K. mainland and is very popular and highly valued by both local people and visitors. A recently completed, dedicated horse-riding track has been provided in the forest by the Dunnet Forestry Trust and CRAG is very grateful for this excellent new facility.

Access From: Dunnet beach and forest are located between the villages of Castletown and Dunnet on the A836 Thurso to John 'O' Groats road. From Thurso, turn at the traffic lights beside Somerfield supermarket onto the A836, signed to Castletown which is about 4 ½ miles along this road. Continue through the village and Dunnet Bay is approximately 2 ¼ miles further on. You will see Dunnet forest on your right- look out for the works entrance at the far end. On your nearside, you will notice a path running alongside the caravan/camp site; slow down and turn first left into the Pavilion car park. If travelling from Wick, take the A99 to John 'O' Groats and then turn left onto the A836 for Dunnet. Continue through the village. Dunnet Bay is about 1 mile further on and the Pavilion car park is on your right hand side.

Parking: There is usually ample parking space and plenty of turning room but please be aware that there are likely to be other visitors, including families with children and dogs so be especially careful and considerate when unloading and loading your horse. There are public toilets available in the Pavilion (a rare bonus for horse riders!) and also an outside tap supplying fresh water. Please take great care when exiting this car park as it leads onto a fast stretch of road with bends that limit your visibility when pulling out.

Ride Report - Dunnet Beach

From the car park, a pebbly track leads down moderately steeply for a short distance onto the sand. The access point may be busy and being used by other people so please proceed cautiously. You may wish to lead your horse down this short stretch and mount up upon the beach. You have about 3 miles of beach available to you and even in high season, there is usually plenty of space for you to enjoy a glorious ride! Land Management: Dunnet beach and the multi-use path are owned by Highland Council.

General Information: CRAG advises checking the tide times before you visit so that you can plan your trip accordingly. Tide times can be obtained from the Caithness Community website: www.caithness.org.uk/ and from the 'Press and Journal' newspaper.

The telephone number for the Highland Council Ranger Centre/ Dunnet Pavilion is: 01847 821319
Contact number for the Senior Ranger is: 01847 821531

Ride Report Dunnet Forest- 1.5 miles in length

Go out of the car park and turn right along the path that runs between the main road and the caravan/camp site. Proceed for a short distance to the end of the path and then cross over the road into a broad access with a gate set back from the road. This is called the works access. There is a gap between the gate and the fence on the right hand side and you proceed through this onto the forest track. Go straight on up this track past a works area where there may be gravel or logs piled up and possibly forest vehicles parked. A little further on, turn first left onto the horse track that, for most of its length, has a surface of sand and peat. Sections over culverts have been surfaced with wood chippings. The track is suitable to be ridden at walk with stretches where it may be possible to trot. Go right to the end and follow the track around to the left, ignoring any paths that cross over the main track. The track dives for a short distance into the trees and here, the trees have been cut off at ground level so the stumps are still in the ground. Proceed with caution here. Eventually, you rejoin the main track near the starting point having followed a roughly circular route and you then re-trace your steps to the car park.

Land Management: Dunnet Forestry Trust

General information: Please note that there may be awnings etc flapping from tents and caravans parked in the campsite and people moving about. The path running alongside the main road is only separated from the campsite by a fence. You may wish to lead your horse along here if you feel it might be spooked. The gap at the works access is relatively narrow- you may wish to lead your horse through this also. Several paths cross over the horse track and you may encounter other people and dogs in the forest. It is hoped that *riders will stay on the horse track* and that other forest visitors will mainly use the many alternative paths that are available. Please remember that there is no parking available for horseboxes at the Forest itself but only at the Pavilion.

Forest Manager: Jon Hollingdale, Dunnet Forestry Trust: 01847 821527

Access officer David Barclay: 01955 605858

Useful websites:

www.caithnessridersaccessgroup.co.uk/

www.bhsscotland.org.uk

www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

Caithness Riders Access Group Code of Conduct

We would advise anyone planning to ride any route to walk it and assess if it is suitable for them to ride before taking their horse out on it.

Riders should always proceed with courtesy, care and consideration for all other users and landowners.

Remember that hooves can damage surfaces in wet conditions and after frost. Always try to ride on the middle of the track or the verge.

Be aware that others can be frightened of horses; stop, or proceed with caution, and do not canter past them. Whenever possible acknowledge courtesy shown by other users, especially to drivers of motor vehicles.

Leave all gates as you find them.

Park horseboxes carefully and always leave access points clear.

Clear up all droppings from parking areas.

Take your rubbish and litter home.

Ensure that you and your horse are clearly visible to others.



Know the Code before you go

Enjoy Scotland's outdoors. Everyone has the right to be on most land and inland water for recreation, education and for going from place to place providing they act responsibly. These access rights and responsibilities are explained in the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. The key things are:

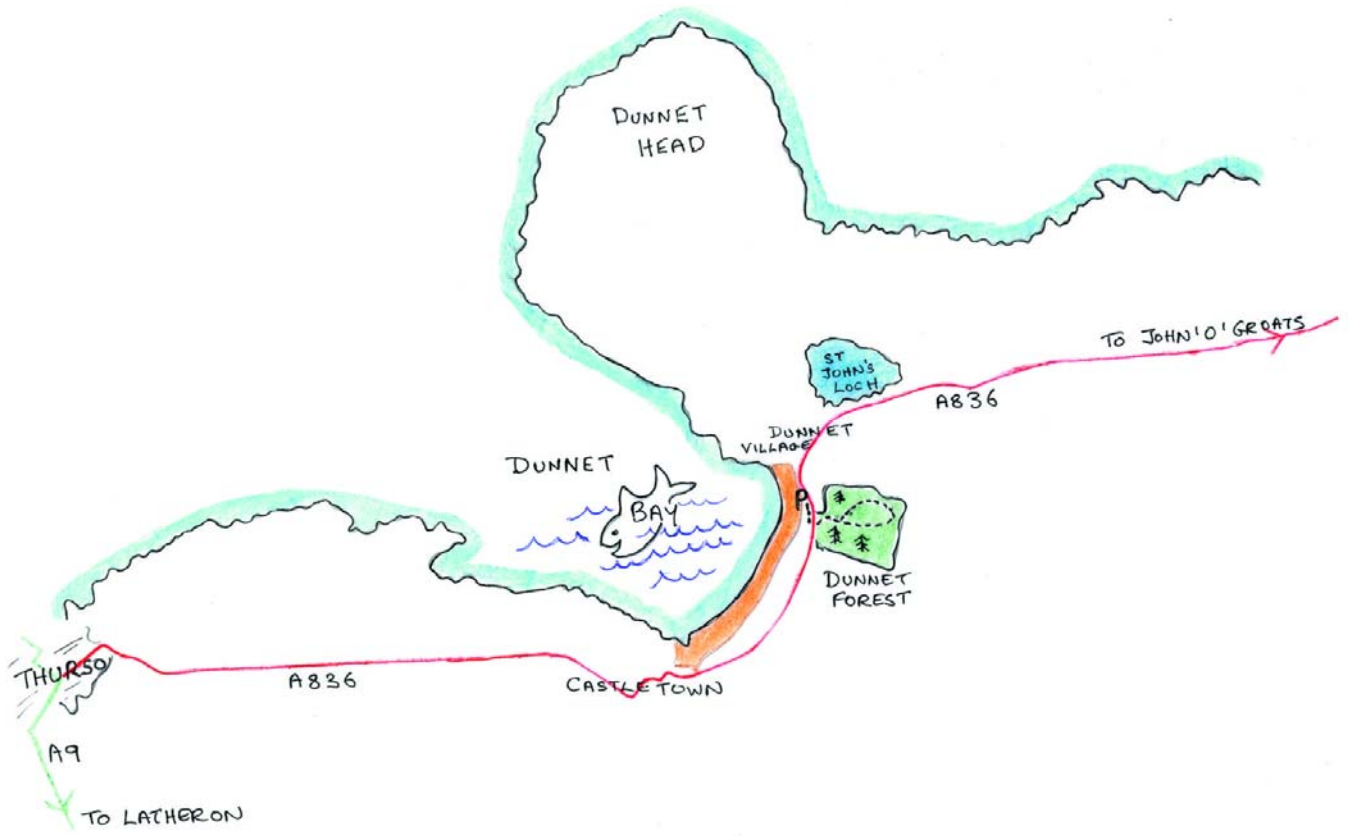
When you're in the outdoors:

- take personal responsibility for your own actions and act safely;
- respect people's privacy and peace of mind;
- help land managers and others to work safely and effectively;
- care for your environment and take your litter home;
- keep your dog under proper control;
- take extra care if you're organising an event or running a business.

If you're managing the outdoors:

- respect access rights;
- act reasonably when asking people to avoid land management operations;
- work with your local authority and other bodies to help integrate access and land management
- respect rights of way and customary access

Find out more by visiting www.outdooraccess-scotland.com or phoning your local Scottish Natural Heritage office.



The attached map shows how to get there