

FREE

Newton Stewart Walks

Gateway to the Galloway Hills

*Compiled by:
Newton Stewart Walking Festival
Newton Stewart Walkers Are Welcome*

Newton Stewart looking south towards the Machars peninsula





Newton Stewart and the Galloway Hills

Newton Stewart and the Galloway Hills

Newton Stewart lies in the heart of Galloway, is the gateway to the Galloway Hills, and has been a Walkers are Welcome town since 2009.

It owes its character to the River Cree, the historic boundary between the two districts of Galloway – the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright to the east and Wigtownshire to the west. It sits at the lowest bridging point of the river, which winds its way from its source in Loch Moan high up in Galloway Forest Park to where it enters the sea in Wigtown Bay.

On the east bank lie the old settlements of Creebridge and Minnigaff, dating back to medieval times while Newton Stewart itself, on the west bank, originated in the late eighteenth century as a

planned town using the water of the Cree to power textile mills. Four bridges, two vehicular and two pedestrian, cross the Cree within the precincts of the town and another two cross its tributary, the Penkiln. These feature in our picturesque walks and provide a viewpoint from which to watch anglers on the hunt for salmon, sea trout and brown trout.

Newton Stewart today serves as an important market town, with a range of interesting shops, cafes and services for visitors and local residents.

The town stretch for a mile and a half along the banks of the Cree, with the low-lying town centre on the west bank. Interesting buildings include the old town hall and clocktower, the Art Deco



Cree Bridge and River Cree

community-owned cinema, the impressive McMillan Hall, and the octagonal livestock mart which reminds us that Newton Stewart is still an important service centre for the surrounding farming community.

Behind the main street, steep lanes lead to newer residential areas from which you can enjoy spectacular views of the Galloway Hills. The town is dominated by the great rounded mass of Cairnmore of Fleet, with the more northerly skyline of the Minnigaff Hills, Larg, Lamachan and Curleywee, visible from several walks. Open countryside and its wildlife is on the town's doorstep, with woodlands, like Doonhill and Bower Wood, right on the edge of the town.

The Galloway Forest Park, Wigtown Bay and Wood of Cree Nature Reserves are all nearby and offer a range of walking opportunities. More information of these can be found on the

information board outside the Belted Galloway Visitor Centre, beside the riverside carpark. The quality of the countryside has been recognised by its international designations as a UNESCO Biosphere and as a Dark Sky Park.

The walker has a good chance of seeing red squirrels, roe and fallow deer in the forests and fields while the bird life ranges from the summer warblers of the woodlands to the winter spectacular of overwintering wildfowl on the mudflats of the estuary.

www.newtonstewart.org





Sparling Bridge over the River Cree

The walks

This booklet contains details of nine walks in and around Newton Stewart

1. **Riverside Poetry Walk**
2. **Cree Flood Plain**
3. **Old Minnigaff and the Two Rivers**
4. **The Town Periphery**
5. **Doonhill Woods**
6. **“The Country Ones” Walk**
7. **Penkiln Burn and Cumlodan Deerpark**
8. **The Port Road**
9. **Moss of Cree and Wigtown, Scotland’s Booktown**

These have been selected to encourage people of all degrees of fitness to explore the town and its surroundings on foot and to help promote Newton Stewart as a ‘Walkers are Welcome’ town. They are easy or moderate walks and all start at the Riverside Carpark in Newton Stewart (postcode DG8 6NQ, grid reference NX413 653)



Walks 1 to 7 are circular, starting and ending at the carpark. Walks 8 and 9 are longer linear walks finishing at Creetown and Wigtown respectively. Public transport is available for the return journey or, if you prefer, you can take the bus out to Creetown or Wigtown and walk back into town. Bus service 415 operates between Newton Stewart and Wigtown while service 500 operates between Newton Stewart and Creetown.

Bus timetables can be found on the Dumfries and Galloway Council website www.dumgal.gov.uk/timetables

Route information

Each route description in this booklet includes:

- A brief summary of the route
- The distance in miles and kilometres
- The terrain you will encounter along the route
- The time you should allow to undertake the walk
- A description of the route including directions and points of interest. Look out for colour coded route-markers which match the colours in this booklet

Note that the description 'barrier-free' indicates suitability for wheelchairs or childrens' buggies.



**SCOTTISH OUTDOOR
ACCESS CODE**
outdooraccess-scotland.scot



The orange covered Ordnance Survey OS Explorer 1;25,000 maps numbers 319 and 311 cover the area in detail.

When enjoying these walks, please follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code

- Enjoy the countryside and respect its life and work
- Leave gates as you find them
- Keep dogs under close control at all times
- Keep to the route across farmland and the golf course
- Take care on country roads
- Use gates and stiles to cross fences, hedges and walls
- Respect farm livestock, crops and machinery
- Take your litter home with you
- Protect wildlife, plants and trees
- Guard against risk of fire
- Make no unnecessary noise
- Take particular care crossing A75

Walk 1: Riverside Poetry Walk

Description: A circular riverside walk taking in both banks of the River Cree, with added interest of poetry inscriptions. Look out for verses celebrating the River Cree by Liz Niven (also published as 'Cree Lines', Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association) and by local school pupils

Distance: 1.5 miles / 2.5 kilometres

Time: Allow 1 hour

Terrain: The route includes paved path and side roads, plus sections of grass path which may be wet. Mainly level but includes steps and kissing gates.

Directions: Starting from the Riverside carpark, this walk is enlivened by inscriptions of poetry celebrating the River Cree and the role it has played in the story of Newton Stewart. Some were written by local poet, Liz Niven; others are the work of local school pupils, marking the opening of the new Sparling Bridge in 2019.

Before leaving the carpark enjoy the verse, Cree Seasons, on the plaque on the river bank, and then follow the west bank of the river downstream past the new Sparling Bridge, named after the relatively rare migratory fish which come to the river each spring to spawn. Enjoy distant views of Cairnsmore of Fleet and river scenes of anglers and river birds like mallards and

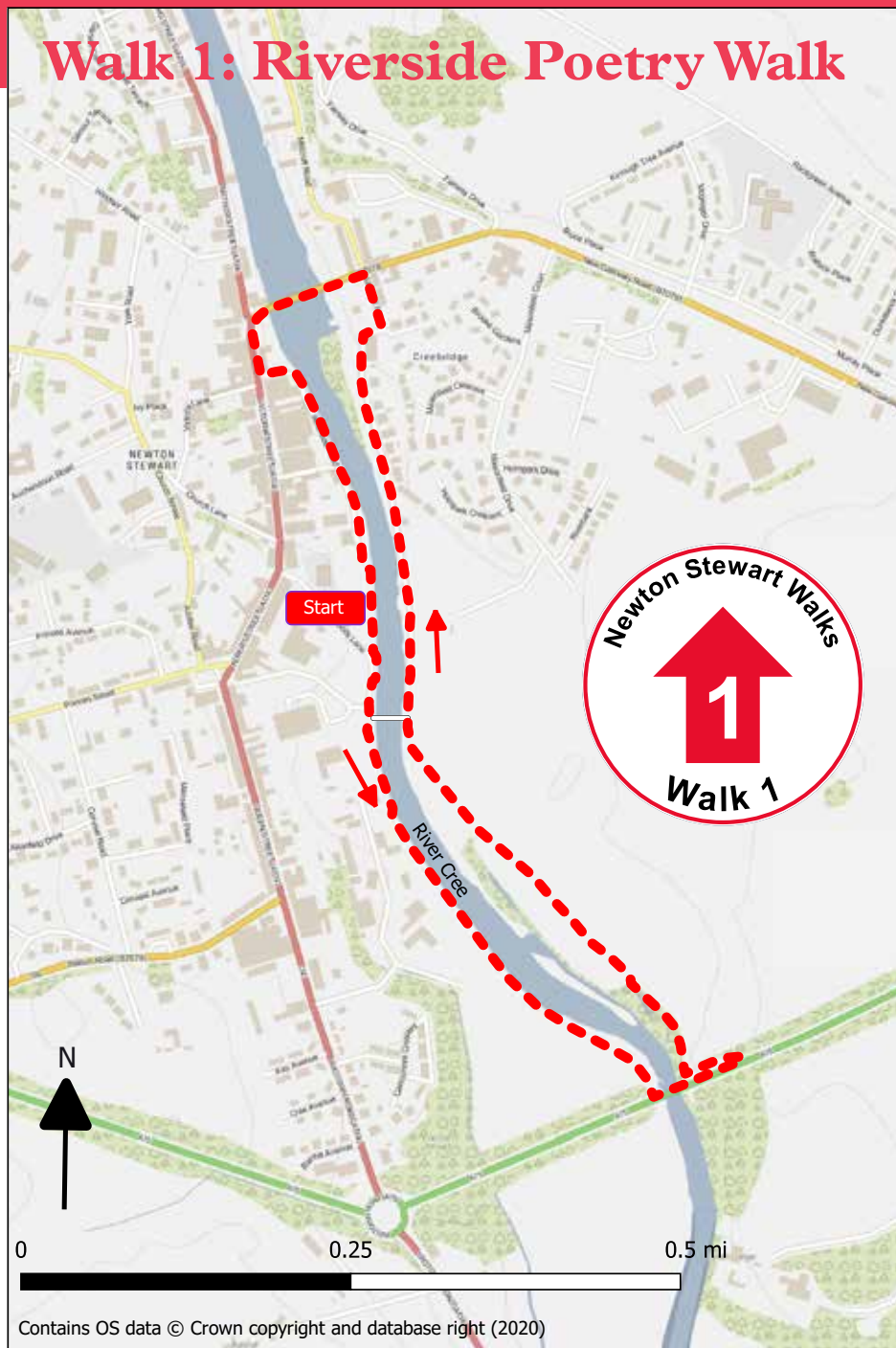


swans and, in summer, swallows swooping low over the river.

At the bypass under the main A75 road, climb the steps to the right and cross the river to the anglers' lay-by where another poem engraved on granite 'Stravaigers's Rest' reminds us of travellers through Galloway as well as local folk. Descend the path to the east bank of the Cree and a woodrush-lined woodland path, before crossing a field to the east end of the Sparling Bridge.

Carry straight on along the riverside to the main road before turning left across the attractive Cree Bridge built in 1813, replacing an earlier wooden bridge and ford on this important river crossing point with its old tollhouse. Turn left passing the gardens and memorial to Randolph, Ninth Earl of Galloway. You can return to the carpark either via the main street or, by turning left at the eighteenth century clocktower, via the riverside.

Walk 1: Riverside Poetry Walk



Start at Riverside Car Park, Grid Reference NX412 653

Walk 2: Cree Flood Plain

Description: A pleasant stroll along the banks and floodplain of the River Cree at far as Nether Barr, with views of the Minnigaff Hills, returning by the same route
Distance: 2.6 miles / 4.2 kilometres
Time: Allow 1.5 hours

Terrain: Barrier-free, all on paved cycle path; mainly on the level but including approximately 60m stretch with 14% gradient.

Directions and points of interest: The first section of this walk follows the same route as the first part of Walk 1, but stays on the west bank of the Cree under the A75.

Leaving the Riverside carpark head downstream passing the new Sparling footbridge. This bridge, completed in 2019, replaced an earlier bridge damaged by severe flooding in December 2015. Look out for the birds which frequent the river - mallards, mute swans and swallows skimming over the river surface on summer evenings.

Leaving the town behind, you pass under the A75 by-pass bridge and follow the cycle path which skirts the edge of the Cree floodplain. Across the river the turreted roof of Machermore Castle, whose 19th century Baronial architecture incorporates an earlier tower, is visible.

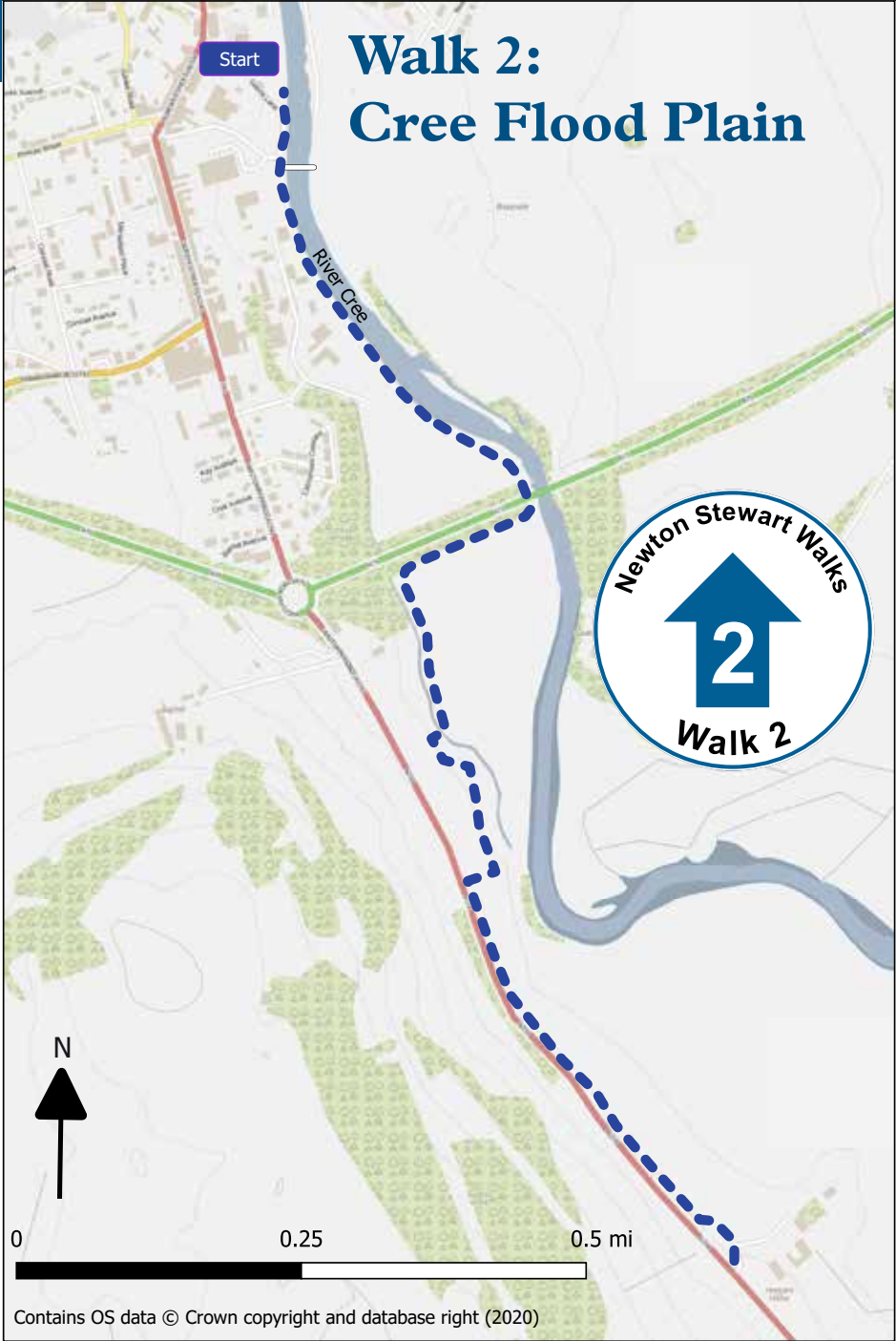
The river meanders in wide sweeps across its floodplain and



this area frequently floods when heavy rain and high tides coincide. To the left of the footpath lie marshy meadows with reed beds on the right. Look out for the plants such as rushes, sedges, lady's smock and meadow sweet associated with this habitat.

Take a breather at the handy bench and enjoy the view to the left of the hill mass of Cairnsmore of Fleet and the village of Blackcraig. The rocks around Cairnsmore of Fleet contain mineable seams of lead and copper and Blackcraig was a centre of lead mining in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Turning at Nether Barr retrace your route back to town, enjoying the fine views of the town and its backdrop of the Minnigaff Hills - Larg, Lamachan and the distinctive 'peak' of Curleywee. In this direction you get a good impression of the site of Newton Stewart at the lowest bridging point of the River Cree and appreciate why it earns its title as the 'Gateway to the Galloway Hills'.



Start at Riverside Car Park, Grid Reference NX412 653

Walk 3: Old Minnigaff & the 2 Rivers

Description: A circular walk through the old settlement of Minnigaff, featuring the bridges of the Cree and Penkiln Burn.

Distance: 2.7 miles/4.3 kilometres

Time: Allow 1.5 hours

Terrain: A mix of pavements and paved side roads, plus a section of footpath. Includes a few short climbs.

Directions: Leaving Riverside carpark, cross the Sparling Bridge and turn left along the river side. Follow the road along the eastern banks of the river, enjoying the fine view of the Cree Bridge, to the junction with the main road. Go straight ahead through the old settlement of Creebridge passing the old Toll House on your left. The pleasant walk from Creebridge into the centre of Old Minnigaff provides views of the rivers and passes fine buildings such as the old nineteenth century corn mill, now in residential use.

After the Youth Hostel, veer right at the next junction up Old Edinburgh Road, a surviving section of the historic route which carried trade and pilgrims from Edinburgh to Wigtownshire. At the last house, head left through the kissing gate along the lane into Bower Drive. Descend to the main road and cross to the lane on the



left leading to the picturesque Queen Mary's Bridge and the Penkiln Burn. The adjacent building, the Waulk Mill, is another reminder of former industries based on water power.

Turning left, follow the road until you reach Monigaff Church occupying an old defensive site at the junction of the Penkiln and the Cree. Take time to explore the motte and kirkyard with its medieval church ruins before crossing the pedestrian Suspension Bridge into the 'new town' of Newton Stewart.

Turning left through the public gardens you cross a mill lade before entering a new housing development built on the site of the former Cree Mills which continued the tradition of woollen and mohair cloth manufacture until it closed in the 1980s. At the main street cross diagonally and climb the steep lane. At the top turn left along a footpath which provides fine views of the town and surrounding woods and hills.

At Windsor Road turn left straight down the hill to the Salt Box Brae before regaining the car park via the main street.

Walk 3: Old Minnigaff and the Two Rivers



0

0.25

0.5 mi

Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2020)

Start at Riverside Car Park, Grid Reference NX412 653

Walk 4: The Town Periphery

Description: A route making a circuit of the town, with a pleasing mixture of woodland and open space offering panoramic views of Newton Stewart.

Distance: 4 miles / 6.5 kilometres

Time: Allow 2.5 hours

Terrain: Mainly unpaved paths with the likelihood of muddy sections; 80m of ascent with some moderate slopes.

Directions: Leaving the Riverside carpark, cross the River Cree via the Sparling Bridge, turn left and follow the side road along the river bank. At the main road at the Cree Bridge turn right, passing the petrol station. As the road veers to the right, take the pedestrian route straight ahead through the bollards to Kirroughtree Avenue.

Passing the golf pavilion on the left cross the line of the Old Military Road, the old route to Ireland, and take a path to the left leading to the golf course. Skirt the golf course on its right hand perimeter, watching out for players, but enjoying the fine views over the town and the policies of Kirroughtree House, once the seat of the Heron family.

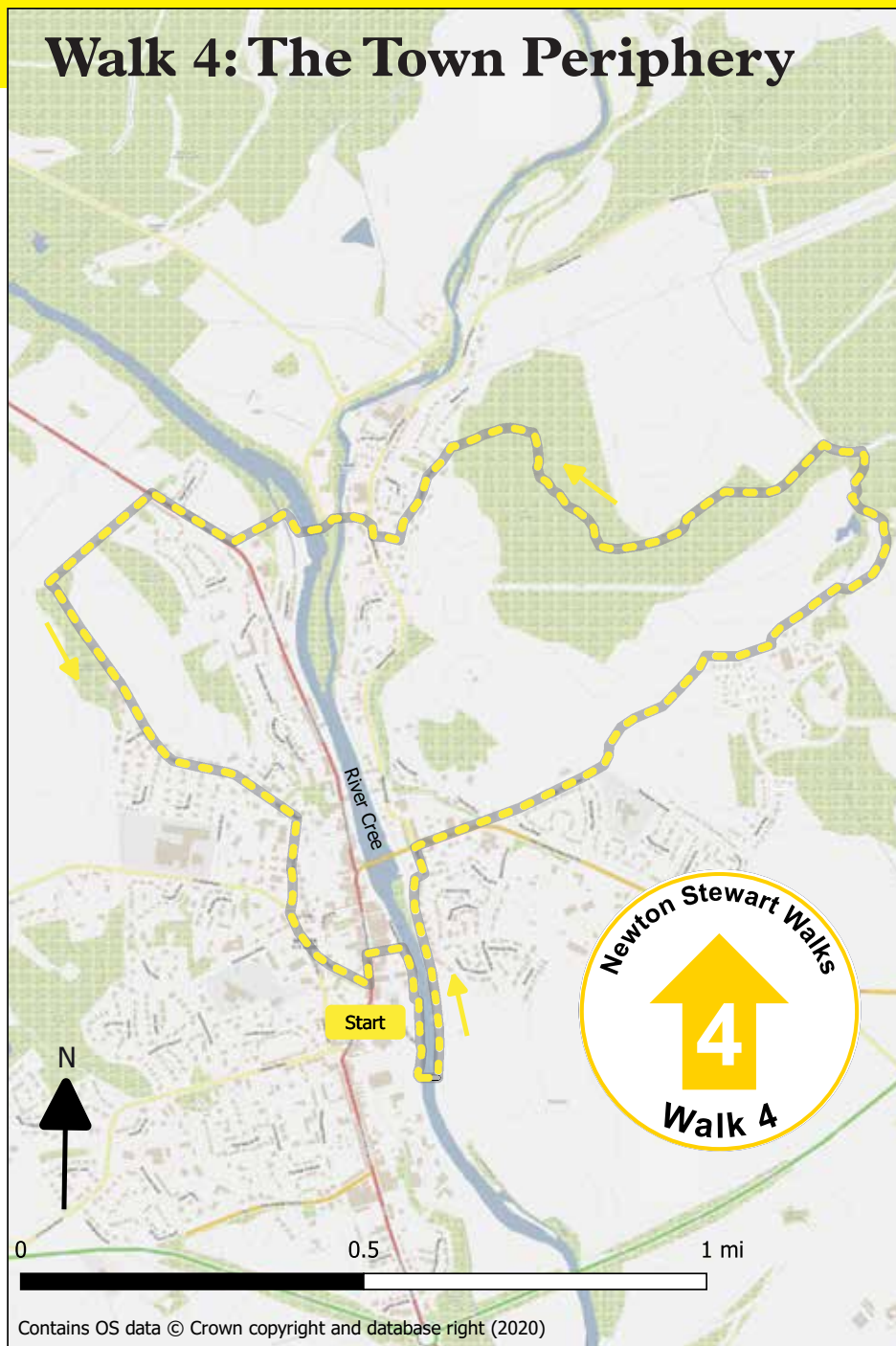
At the far end of the golf course, turn left along a gravel path and enter the Wild Wood through a gap in the wall. Climbing through the trees to a gravel road, turn left and



then sharp left along a woodland path. Follow waymarkers through the mature coniferous plantation of Wild Wood and Bower Wood with the chance to detour to the left to visit the Doocot, a popular local landmark dating back to the early eighteenth century. Leave the wood at the Old Edinburgh Road, and head downhill to the junction with the main road.

Turn right then first left, signed Wood of Cree Reserve, crossing first the Penkiln Burn and then the Cree via the Suspension Bridge. Turn right following the paved road up to Douglas Terrace turning right at the letter box. At the 30 mile limit take the track to the left signed Duncree House. Climb the slope, enjoying the scenery of hillocks of glacial moraine on your right with unfolding views of the Minnigaff Hills, to the corner of a plantation where you turn left down a dyke-edged farm track. Proceed down past Old Hall Farm to Windsor Drive. Turn right at York Road past the town tennis courts and Newton Stewart Museum on your way back to the car park.

Walk 4: The Town Periphery



Start at Riverside Car Park, Grid Reference NX412 653

Walk 5: Doonhill Woods

Description: A pleasant walk on the outskirts of Newton Stewart including woodland and pond with panoramas of the town and surrounding hills

Distance: 2.5 miles / 4 kilometres

Time: Allow 1.5 hours

Terrain: A mixture of paved sidewalks and woodland paths.

Directions: Leave Riverside Car Park via the main access road signed to the town centre. At the main street turn left up hill past the Bank of Scotland. At Dashwood Square turn right admiring, on the left, the mass of McMillan Hall, a monument to Victorian confidence and enterprise.

Climb up Princes Street until you reach a kissing gate on the right, which gives access to Doonhill Woods. This area of mixed woods, consisting of mainly ash, oak and sycamore was part of a project by Cree Valley Community Woodland Trust, whose vision was to recreate a continuous corridor of native woodlands along the full length of the Cree Valley. This woodland brings spring bluebells, nesting tits and evening bats right into the town.

Follow the Newton Stewart Walks waymarkers which bear uphill and take you into Blairmount Park through a stand of beech. Skirting the edge of the

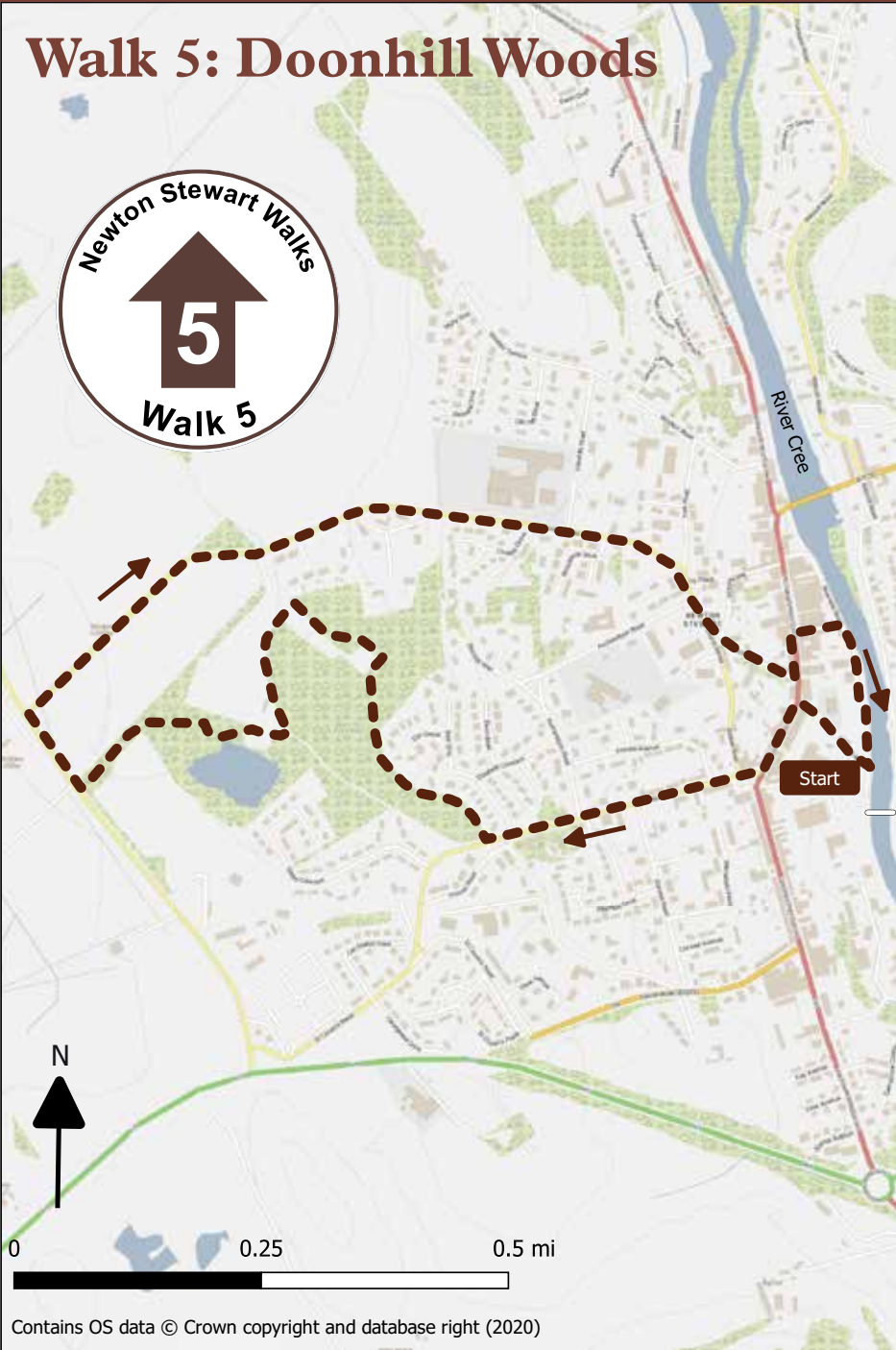


park, past the pavilion, you reach a pond and boardwalk. This former curling pond has been modified to provide a variety of habitat for plants like bogbean and marsh cinquefoil and look out for waterfowl, frogs and toads, or dragonfly and damselfly hovering over the summer waters.

Leaving the pond, continue through the larch plantation before taking a left turn leading to a public road. Turn right for a few yards, then right again and follow the side road which will take you back into town. On the way you will enjoy spectacular views over Newton Stewart with Cairnsmore of Fleet straight ahead and the Minnigaff Hills ranged on the left.

The road leads past the Merrick Leisure Centre and Douglas Ewart High School, the secondary school serving Newton Stewart and the Machars. At the foot of the road turn right and then veer left downhill opposite the bowling green to return to the main street and car park.

Walk 5: Doonhill Woods



Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2020)

Start at Riverside Car Park, Grid Reference NX412 653

Walk 6: “The Country Ones” walk

Description: An easy walk on the floodplain of the River Cree, the landscape of which is evocatively described in local author Mary Curran’s book “The Country Ones” (ReadingLasses Press, Wigtown, 1998) which describes the childhood of young Aggie Kenny on a Galloway farm in the post-World War 1 period.

Distance: 5 miles /8.2 kilometres

Time: Allow 2.5 hours

Terrain: Barrier-free, level, on paved side-roads and cycle paths with two crossings of the A75 trunk road.

Directions: From the Riverside Car Park cross the Sparling Bridge and turn left. A cycle path to the right leads through a housing estate until you reach the main road (same as Walk 9) where you turn right, following Aggie’s route to school.

Follow the cycle path until the junction at Machermore cemetery where you take the slip road on the right before carefully crossing the A75 to Aggie’s hedge-bordered lane: “a country world that made up the Little Valley hemmed in between Barr in the west and Larg in the east with Cairnsmore looming behind for the sun to climb over in the morning.”

After Carsenaw Farm you pass the cottage, Rushiepark, which was Aggie’s home. The name, like the ‘carse’ suffix in farm names, reminds us that this land is composed of marine clays

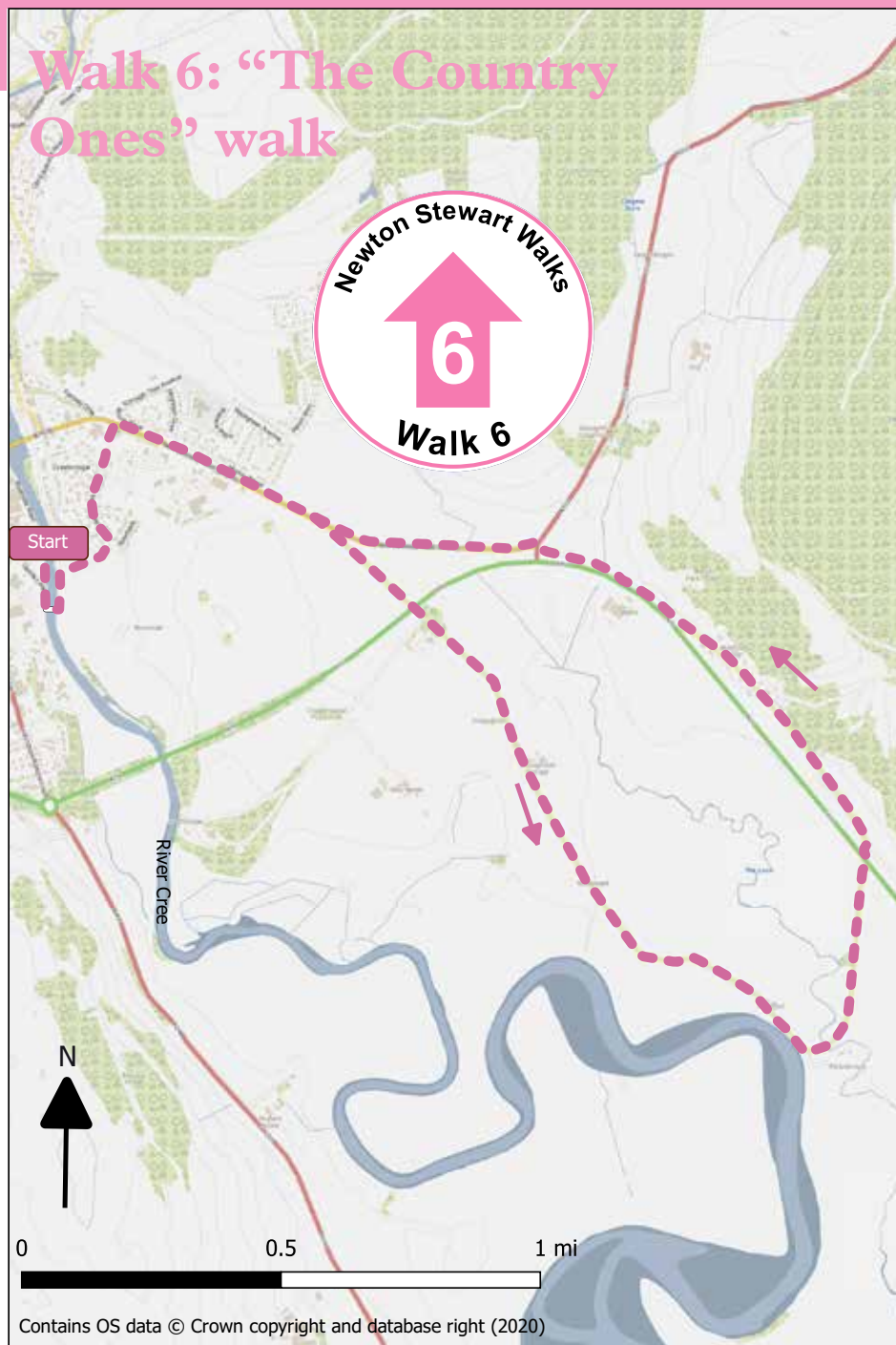


deposited by post-glacial seas and needs careful drainage to maintain the fertile dairy-farming industry we see today.

Continue on the gentle lane past the meandering Cree whose “soughing reeds” and the “flat full look of clay-coloured water when the tide came creeping up from the bay” frightened Aggie. Then bear left to cross the A75 into the approach road to Blackcraig village – Aggie’s “Hill Village”, where lead was mined in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Aggie and her father liked to visit the McClurg family: “Mrs McClurg’s house was one of a straggling row of white-washed cottages with a thatched roof. Behind the house was a long garden with a row of bee-boxes down one side and a pig-house at the far end.”

Leaving Blackcraig, follow the Sustrans Route 7 cycle path. Cross the A712, past the site of a skirmish in 1300 between English forces under Edward 1 and the Comyns in the Wars of Independence. Follow the old boundary wall of Kirroughtree estate policies back into town.

Walk 6: “The Country Ones” walk



Start at Riverside Car Park, Grid Reference NX412 653

Walk 7: Penkiln Burn & Cumloden Deer Park

Description: A walk with attractive riverside and woodlands sections on Cumloden Estate and featuring the attractive Penkiln Burn and Knockman Wood with archaeological interest.

Distance: 4.6 miles/7.4 kilometres

Time: Allow 3 hours but walk may be shortened by approximately 1 hour by starting and finishing at Monigaff Church carpark (Postcode DG8 6SH, grid reference NX410 666)

Terrain: A combination of paved sidewalks and grassy paths which may include boggy or muddy sections. Level or gentle slopes.

Directions: Cross the Sparling Bridge and turn left along the river bank, following the side street to the main road at Creebridge. Cross the road and head through Creebridge and Old Minnigaff, carrying on straight ahead at Cumloden Road.

After the junction with Bower Drive turn left down a lane to Queen Mary's Bridge across the Penkiln Burn and turn sharp right along the streamside path. The Penkiln Burn tumbles through mixed woodlands with banks of woodrush, while the fields to the left are bordered by fine examples of Galloway drystone dykes.

Passing through a kissing gate at Garden Cottage you enter Cumloden Deer Park – an extensive unfenced area of land abandoned from agriculture and

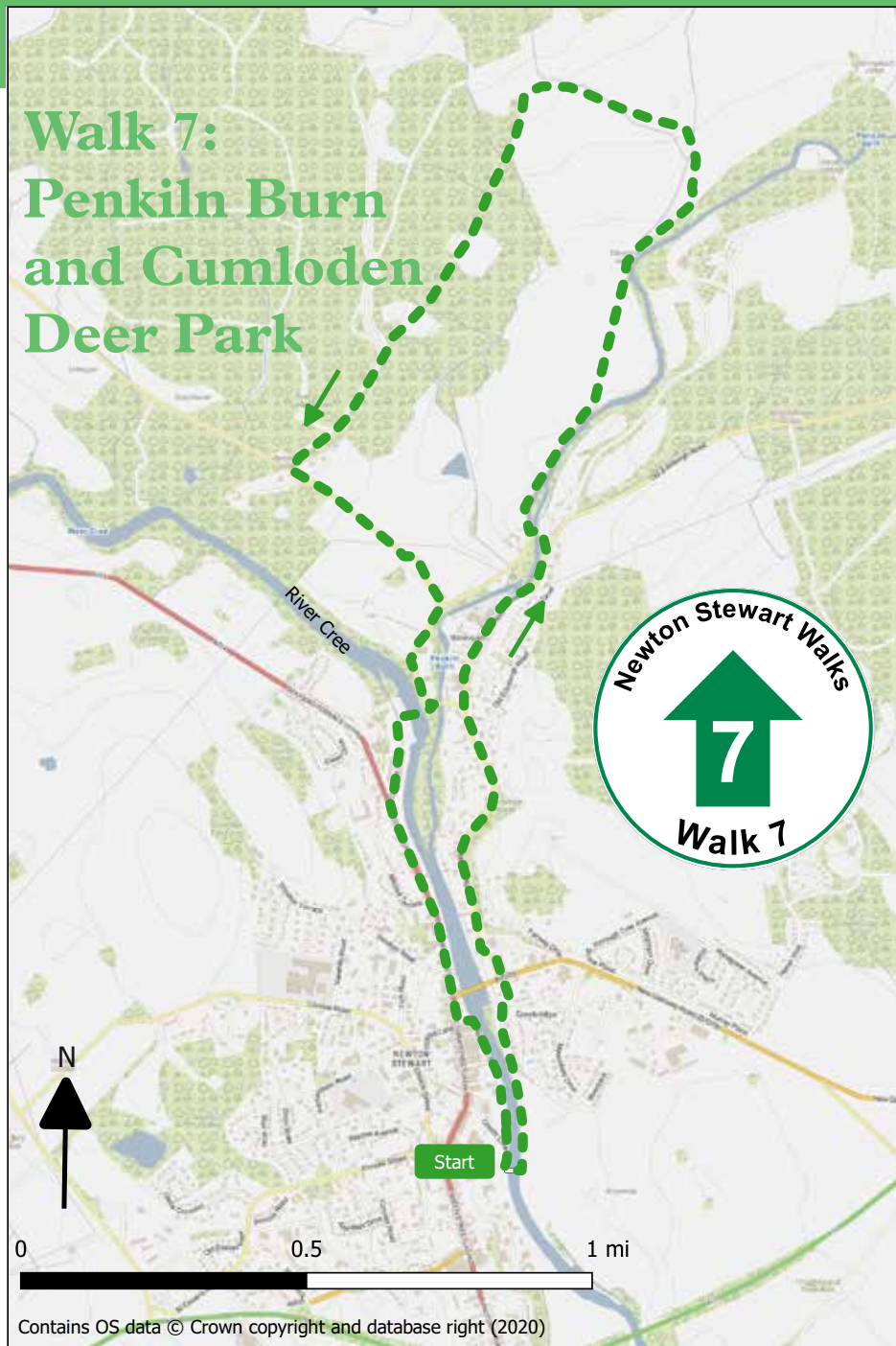


converted into deer park for sport by General Sir William Stewart of Cumloden in the early nineteenth century. The moor is peppered with prehistoric hut circles and cairns as well as wildlife interest.

Opposite a small white gate in the wall of the estate policies turn left, crossing an area with a mosaic of bogs and grassy knolls and studded with lovely park oak trees with spreading canopies. Fork left past a cairn-topped knoll and climb through rough bracken-covered ground to a gate leading into Knockman Wood. An archaeological trail explains the farming landscape of the past with its deserted fermtouns and corn kilns.

Turn sharp left keeping the spruce plantation on your right and head down to the public road, where you turn left and follow the road past Monigaff Church (see walk 3 for further description), before crossing the Cree on the Suspension Bridge. Across the bridge bear left through the new housing estate on the site of the former Cree Mills, climbing to join the main road at King St. Follow this street back to the town centre enjoying the river views and the pleasant riverside gardens.

Walk 7: Penkiln Burn and Cumloden Deer Park



Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2020)

Start at Riverside Car Park, Grid Reference NX412 653

Walk 8: The Port Road

Description:

A pleasant linear walk to the village of Creetown, with woodland stretches, and panoramic views of the Cree Estuary

Distance: 7.5 miles /12 kilometres

Time: Allow 4 hours

Terrain: Tarred side roads and cycle path with one short but very steep ascent.

Directions: Starting at Riverside Carpark, cross the Sparling Bridge, turn left and then right along a hedge-fringed cycleway. At the housing estate bear left until you reach the main road. Turn right and thereafter follow the signed Sustrans cyclepath 7 all the way to Creetown.

The first section follows the old boundary wall of the policies of Kirroughtree Estate before crossing the A712 to Blackcraig village. As you climb the steep Mines Hill, pause to enjoy views of the Cree floodplain. At the top of the hill you will pass ruins of the cottages of Blackcraig mining village where lead and copper were mined in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. You are now entering Galloway Forest Park. The coniferous forest, with its fringe of beech trees, which clothes the hill from here to Stronord masks the old mining landscape of mine shafts, adits and spoil heaps (For more information visit Kirroughtree

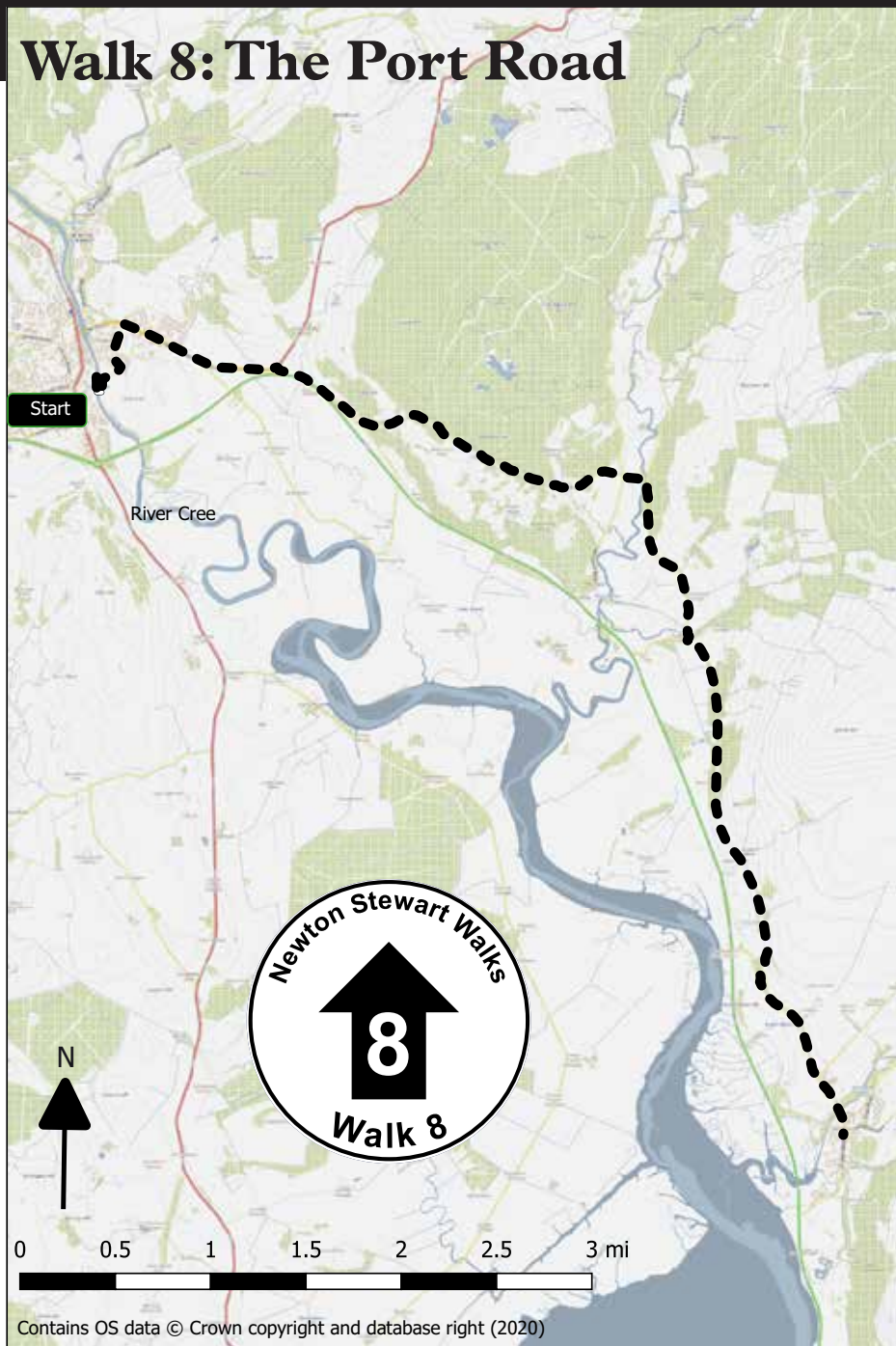


Visitors' Centre and follow the Lade Trail).

At Stronord enjoy the view of the great hill mass of Cairnsmore of Fleet. Keeping straight ahead at the crossroads you cross the old stone bridge across the Palnure Burn which drains Bargaly Glen, one of the loveliest glens in the area.

Turn right and follow the road until you reach the Greddock Burn where you join a section of the old railway line, the Port Road, which served Stranraer and Northern Ireland, before the Beeching axe fell in the 1960s. For the next half hour you pass through mixed woods and shaded railway cuttings where the water-soaked rocks provide an ideal habitat for many varieties of mosses and ferns, including hart's tongue, polypody, and maiden hair spleenwort. Enjoy spectacular views of the carselands of the meandering Cree, under sea level in post-glacial times, and later reclaimed from peat bog to yield fertile dairying farmland. Areas of unreclaimed moss are still visible. At the end of the cyclepath, follow the road into Creetown where the fine public space of Adamson Square reminds you of its granite heritage.

Walk 8: The Port Road



Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2020)

Start at Riverside Car Park, Grid Reference NX412 653

Walk 9: The Moss of Cree & Wigtown, Scotland's Booktown

Description: A linear walk through the flood plain of the River Cree skirting Wigtown Bay Nature Reserve to finish in historic Wigtown, Scotland's Booktown

Distance: 8 miles / 13 kilometres

Time: Allow 4.5 hours

Terrain: Barrier-free route on paved, mainly level, surfaces but with two short steep sections. Return possible by bus but vehicle may not be wheelchair-accessible

Directions: Leave Riverside Carpark along the west bank of the Cree, following the cycle path to Nether Barr (see details on walk 2 route). At Nether Barr continue along the cycle path until it ends, then take the side road on the left signed Carty Port and Moss of Cree. This leads past the reed beds fringing the meandering Cree and the former Carty Port, the site of a former tile and brick works, a reminder of the importance of river and sea-based commercial trade in the nineteenth century.

The road leads past the birch-fringed Moss of Cree, an area of raised bog, much-modified by coniferous plantations. To the left the flat, green fields of the Cree floodplain support a thriving dairy farming industry, characterised by large modern steadings and intensive production. Farm names like Carsenestock, and Borrowmoss remind us that this land has been



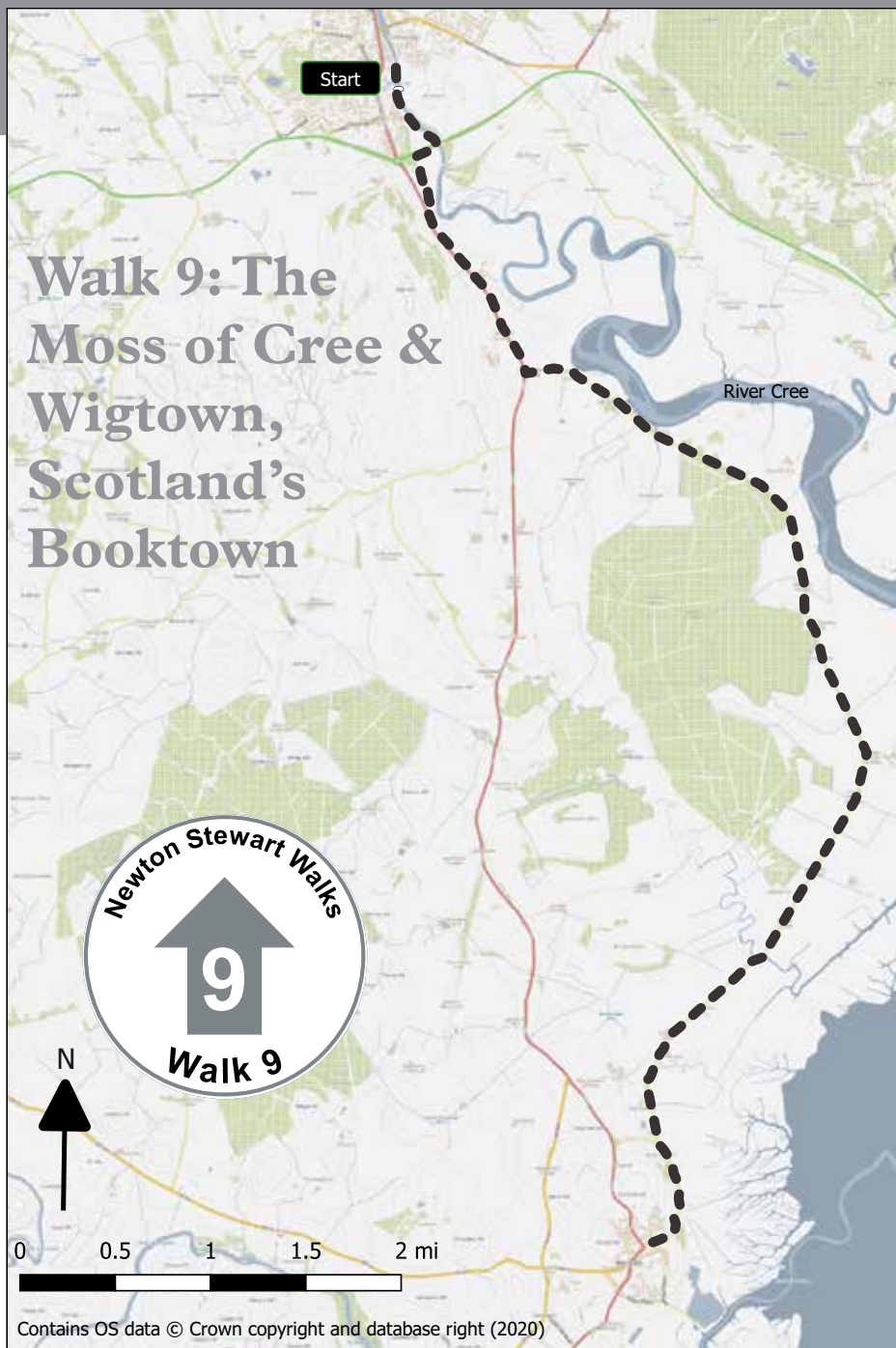
reclaimed from peat bog .

Passing the farm road of Grange of Cree vistas of Wigtown Bay and the estuary of the Cree open out. Looking across to the east side of the river, Creetown, the Ferrytoon of Cree, shelters under the Larg Hill and, further south, the scars of its former granite quarries are visible on the hillside.

Crossing Bishop Burn, the old county town of Wigtown, sitting on its drumlin mound and overlooking the salt marshes of Wigtown Bay Nature Reserve, becomes increasingly visible. These saltings with their tragic history of the Wigtown martyrs, executed by drowning in 1687 for their adherence to the Covenanters' cause, have contributed greatly to the character of the burgh. Today the saltings are better known for their spectacular bird life, especially over-wintering wildfowl and both the Martyr's Stake and the bird hide at Wigtown Harbour are well worth a visit.

The walk ends with a steep climb up to the town centre with its fine nineteenth century county buildings, pleasant streetscape and bookshops.

Walk 9: The Moss of Cree & Wigtown, Scotland's Booktown



Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2020)

Start at Riverside Car Park, Grid Reference NX412 653

Newton Stewart Walking Festival



**A week of guided walks each May exploring the wild hills,
rugged coastline and rolling countryside of Galloway
Find out more at www.walkfestnewtonstewart.com**

Acknowledgements

This booklet has been produced and published by Newton Stewart Walking Festival / Walkers are Welcome Committee.

We are very grateful to David McCreadie for use of a selection of photographs in this publication. See more of David's wonderful photographs of Galloway on his Dabhands Blog page on Facebook
Text by Joan Mitchell – Compiled by Bill Mitchell

Photos by David McCreadie and Bill Mitchell

Booklet designed and printed by J&B Print, Newton Stewart

Waymarkers designed and produced by Galloway Signs, Newton Stewart

Maps designed by and reproduced courtesy of Dumfries and Galloway Council

Thank you to local landowners and Newton Stewart Golf Club for allowing us to cross their land

Once you have finished with this booklet please pass it on to a friend

This booklet was funded by:



Supported by

**Dumfries
& Galloway**



Publication date: August 2021