INDICATIVE TRAIL MAP

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Recommended map Ordnance Survey Landranger sheet 77 Dalmellington & New Galloway

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Edited by Roger Crofts

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WATSON BIRDS

DONALD WATSON ART TRAIL AROUND THE GLENKENS

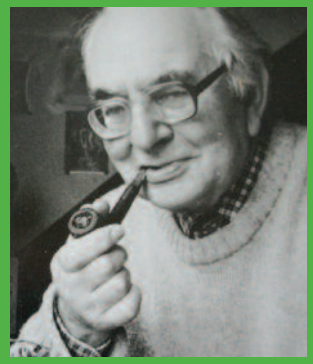
A SELECTION OF SITES TO EXPERIENCE THE ATMOSPHERE THAT INSPIRED THE PAINTINGS OF DONALD WATSON



WATSON BIRDS

DONALD WATSON ART TRAIL AROUND THE GLENKENS

Donald Watson was an internationally renowned wildlife artist and author who lived in St John's Town of Dalry from 1951 until he died in 2005. He had many favourite painting locations in The Glenkens. This trail takes visitors to a selection of these to experience the atmosphere that inspired Donald.



Donald Watson (1918 - 2005)

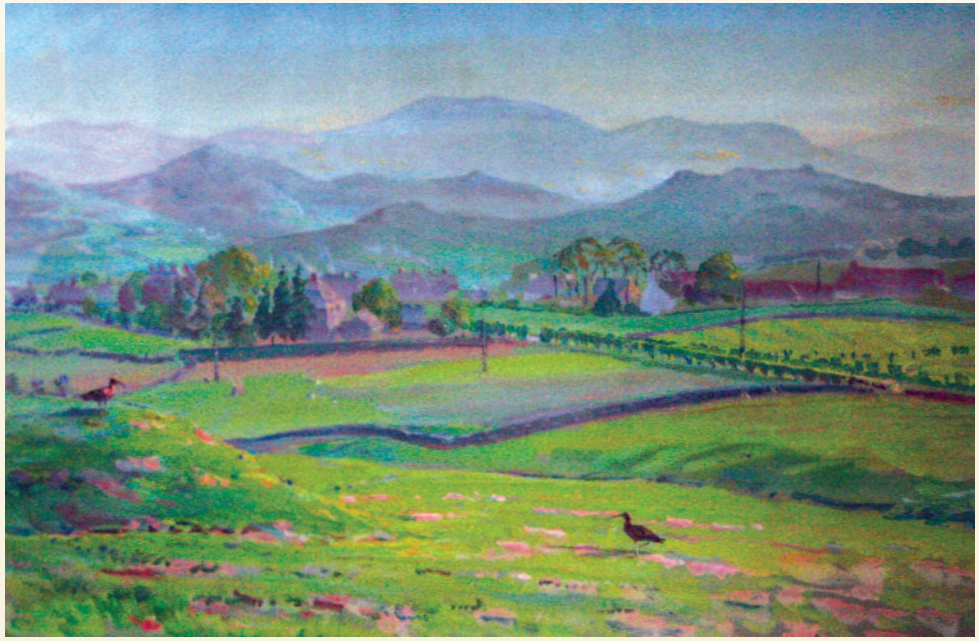
A key aspect of Donald Watson's method, and indeed of his ultimate appeal as a wildlife artist, was to sketch and paint outdoors. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s he travelled extensively in Dumfries & Galloway, particularly the latter, setting up his easel and often completing watercolour and gouache paintings relatively quickly in the outdoors. This forced him to develop and perfect a very loose and impressionistic style that conveyed the spontaneity of his approach and captured the mood and the light of the moment. His paintings reflect this. Indeed, many of them retain traces of raindrops, which he allowed to stand as a testament to his refreshing emulation of his favourite French masters, such as Monet, Cezanne and Corot. The scenic variety of The Glenkens provided a backcloth to much of Donald's art and, like many artists, he had a number of favourite views that he returned to repeatedly for inspiration and context for his more studied and polished later work of the 1970s-1990s.

The trail is arranged as a loop beginning and ending in Dalry with nine stops at Donald's outdoor painting sites. It is approximately 47 miles long. However, the Raiders Road is closed from October to March and then the trail is reduced to eight points and to about 38 miles. Visitors can, of course, undertake the trail by any route they choose, visit whichever sites they wish and use whatever means of transport you wish

THE TRAIL

The Trail begins in the garden of the Town Hall in St John's Town of Dalry where there is an interpretation board. From there travel up the hill on the A702 Moniaive road for about ½ mile and stop in the old quarry on the left hand side.

1



Moss Roddock *(NGR NX632814)*

From a lay-by in a little quarry, or more often parked by the old Royal Observers' Corps post atop a knowe at the entrance to Tower Farm, Donald overlooked his home in the Clachan of Dalry, Moss Roddock Loch and west to his beloved Rhinns of Kells. As in so many of his favourite painting places, this provided a combination of inspiring views and the chance of a bird or two. This spot, or nearby, was the scene for a great many paintings, including wildfowl on the loch, wheatears on the dykes and whaups (curlews) on the fields; and all within two minutes of a fresh cup of tea at home! This painting was created in the early summer of 1951, very soon after Donald moved to the village.

Continue along the A702 for 1½ miles and stop in the old quarry on left hand side opposite the path to Holy Linn waterfall.

AS IN SO MANY OF HIS FAVOURITE PAINTING PLACES, THIS PROVIDED A COMBINATION OF INSPIRING VIEWS AND THE CHANCE OF A BIRD OR TWO

2



Court Knowe *(NGR NX653814)*

Donald looked west towards the captivating skyline of the Rhinns of Kells where he saw soaring buzzards and occasionally foraging hen harriers. One of his most evocative paintings of harriers was set here. It shows a male hen harrier gliding across a strong wind against Cairnsmore or Black Craig o' Dee, and perfectly conveys the distinctive lines and movement of these beautiful birds.

Continue along the A702 for about ½ mile and turn left onto the moorland road signposted for Lochinvar. Here is moorland where Donald would have seen hen harriers in winter. But now the landscape is changing with reductions in sheep grazing, and debates about establishment of wind turbines and/or afforestation. Continue past Lochinvar Loch, through trees and take the right fork and stop at the lay-by at the top of the rise before reaching Butterhole Bridge. **1974.**

ONE OF HIS MOST EVOCATIVE PAINTINGS OF HARRIERS WAS SET HERE

3

Mackilston *(NGR NX638876)*

Various passing places on this single-track road provided favoured sites for Donald. It was here that he often painted hen harriers, red grouse and curlew in a moorland setting, with the distinctive background of the `Carsphairn trinity': Cairnsmore of Carsphairn (or Deugh), Beninner and Moorbrock hills. Hen harriers are a rarer sight now but can be seen in autumn/winter. **1974.**

Return to the fork, turn right and go along the single-track road to the junction with the B7000, turn right and continue for about 3 miles. Just past the High Bridge of Ken take left fork onto B729 and after ¾ mile turn left over girder bridge until junction with A713, turn left and go about 3½ miles to side road signed for Forrest Estate and stop on the side road just past the junction. Distance from Mackilston to Polharrow about 9¾ miles.



THERE'S CAIRNSMORE O' FLEET AND CAIRNSMORE O' DEE BUT CAIRNSMORE O' DEUGH'S THE HIGHEST O' THE THREE!

Old Galloway rhyme

4

Polharrow (Forrest Glen)

(NGR NX600843)

With a view looking northwest towards the spectacular Rhinns of Kells, and surrounded by unimproved and semi-improved pasture, Donald was here able to combine two of his great passions - painting and birdwatching. The lines of the Rhinns were a constant draw, especially when flying clouds brought alternating light and shade to the faces of the hills. Around him in springtime were some of his favourite passerines: wheatear, whinchat and stonechat, with an occasional yellowhammer too. **1952.**

Resume route southwards on A713 for 2 miles and take right fork onto A762 to New Galloway. At the junction in New Galloway, turn right and then immediately take first right onto A712 (towards Newton Stewart) for about 3 miles to next site, a lay-by on the left. Total distance between sites about 8 miles.



DONALD WAS HERE ABLE TO COMBINE TWO OF HIS GREAT PASSIONS - PAINTING AND BIRDWATCHING



ONE OF DONALD'S TOP PLACES TO SEE BARN OWLS

5

New Galloway to Clatteringshaws Road

(NGR NX593774)

The road between New Galloway and Clatteringshaws Loch was one of Donald's top places to see barn owls. The rough grassland and pre-thicket forestry along the roadside provide excellent habitat for short-tailed field voles, their principal prey in Galloway. Dusk is the best time to see them and indeed is when this picture was set in 1981 with the barn owl looking ghostly white in the fading light. Black Craig (or Cairnsmore) of Dee and Benniguinea form the background hills, and the owls have a choice of nest boxes and other breeding sites nearby.

In winter (Raiders Road closed) follow A712 back to New Galloway and take first right onto A762 to Mossdale. Total distance about 8½ miles.

When Raiders Road is open continue along A712 past Clatteringshaws Loch and turn left onto the Raiders Road just before the Black Water of Dee, beneath the dam. The next site is towards the far end of the forest drive at Boddon's Isle. Total distance between sites about 10 miles.

6



Airie Flow Boddon's Isle

(NGR NX635709)

From here Donald watched hen harriers fly to roost from the early 1960s, spending countless hours sketching and painting these and other birds, for example goldeneye and whooper swans on the Black Water o' Dee, or skeins of greylags or white-fronted geese overhead. It was here, more than anywhere else, that he got to know exactly how harriers moved and the magic behind their aerial choreography, as, borne on the wind, they switched back and forth, diving at and interplaying with each other as they went. Here he honed his skill in depicting harriers and painted a great many evocative pictures of groups of harriers behaving in this way. So much so, in fact, that this view of the flow and his pictures of harriers have established themselves in the consciousness of a generation of birdwatchers and bird artists - they are in many ways his trademarks, and unsurprisingly he never tired of painting them.

This site can be visited in winter by walking from the A762 along the old railway from Mossdale to the viaduct, and then around the north side of Stroan Loch by the Raiders Road. (c 4 miles round walk)

From Airie Flow continue along the Raiders Road to the junction with A762, turn right and soon arrive at Mossdale. Total distance 3½ miles.

7

Mossdale *(NGR NX660705)*

From a lay-by just north of Mossdale on the A762, Donald watched and painted several of his most favourite birds, including hen harriers en route to their roosts in winter gloamings, and whinchats in late April and early May. It was here that he often saw these for the first time each spring, perched on fence posts or wires. It was also a place that he glimpsed barn owls on late winter afternoons, and where he delighted in watching newly introduced red kites towards the end of his life. All of these birds can still be seen from here and from the nearby Mossdale walk. **1979.**

Turn around and go northwards again through New Galloway to reach the Ken Bridge Hotel at the junction with the A713. Distance about 5½ miles.

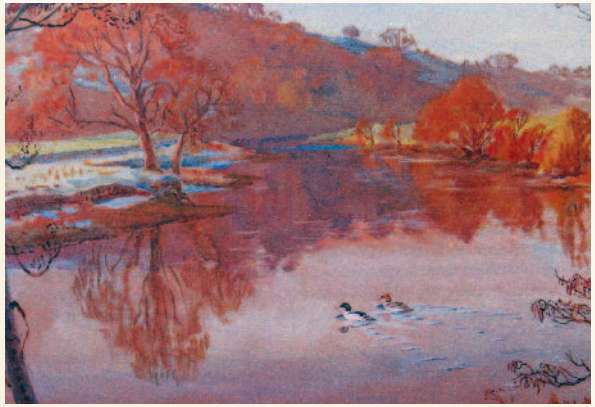


8

Ken Bridge Hotel *(NGR NX641783)*

Lying on the Water of Ken, this is a perfect base from which to view one of Donald's favourite stretches of water and the subject for a good many of his paintings, particularly of goosander. He would park at the hotel, or in a tiny pull-off on the A713 just north of the bridge. This afforded an excellent view of a long stretch of water, with a backdrop of native broadleaved woodland on Knockskaig. **1958.**

Go northwards on the A713 to the layby opposite the garage site.



A PERFECT BASE FROM WHICH TO VIEW ONE OF DONALD'S FAVOURITE STRETCHES OF WATER AND THE SUBJECT FOR A GOOD MANY OF HIS PAINTINGS

9



Dalarran (lay-by) *(NGR NX624802)*

This lay-by was a favourite with Donald, overlooking grazing fields of Icelandic greylags and formerly Greenland white-fronted geese. Occasional groups of whooper swan, various duck and lapwing also use these fields when wet, which is quite often. Sometimes he shifted his position slightly southwards towards the Ken Bridge to take in Dalarran standing stone and the backdrop of the Rhinns of Kells. **1971.**

Return to Dalry by A713 less than 1 mile.

A FAVOURITE WITH DONALD, OVERLOOKING GRAZING FIELDS OF ICELANDIC GREYLAGS AND FORMERLY GREENLAND WHITE-FRONTED GEESE