

Access Guide to Chapel Hill, Balladoole

Manx National Heritage has the guardianship of many ancient monuments in the landscape. A number of these sites are publicly accessible. Please note in most circumstances the land is not in the ownership of Manx National Heritage and visits are made at your own risk.

We recognise that visiting the Island's ancient monuments in the countryside can present difficulties for people with disabilities. We have prepared an access guide for visiting Chapel Hill, Balladoole to help you plan your visit. This access guide does not contain personal opinions as to suitability for those with access needs, but aims to accurately describe the environment at the site.

Introduction

Chapel Hill, Balladoole is a fascinating archaeological site. It has a commanding hill top position and is very close to the sea. Its location means that the area has been used for habitation, defence and burial for thousands of years.

This one small hilltop contains all the main periods of Manx prehistory. Archaeological excavations have uncovered Mesolithic remains (middle stone age); a Bronze Age cist or burial mound; an Iron Age hill fort; an ancient early Christian keeill; an early Christian burial ground; and an unusual Viking ship burial (950-1050AD).

The site was excavated in 1945 by German archaeologist Gerhard Bersu. He was interned on the Island during the Second World War, but was given special permission to leave the camp in order to lead a number of excavations around the Island. He was interested in discovering more about the Iron Age Hill Fort at Balladoole, but during the dig also uncovered a Viking age ship burial. The burial contained an adult male laid out in a wooden Viking ship. Buried alongside him were items such as clothes, tools and horse riding equipment. The ship was buried under a mound at the highest point of Chapel Hill.

Getting to Chapel Hill, Balladoole

Grid Reference: SC 2481 6818

By Car: Journey time from Douglas is approximately 25 minutes. The site is 2km from Castletown. From Castletown head towards Port St Mary (A5). After 1.5km you will pass a right turn signposted Ballabeg (A28), do not take this turn but continue along the A5. After a further 200m take a left turn into Poyllvaish Road (SC 2493 6859). The footpath for Chapel Hill is signposted on the right a further 400m up the road. There is parking for 3-4 vehicles at the entrance to the footpath.



Parking area at base of footpath to Chapel Hill

By bus: The route between Castletown and Port St Mary (A5) is a main bus route. Please ask the driver to drop you as near as possible to Poyllvaish Road/Balladoole Farm. Poyllvaish Road is on the level, and is a small country road with no pavements. It is a 400 metre walk up the road.

Access for Visitors

There is no vehicular access to the top of Chapel Hill and the site cannot be seen from the road. There are no toilets or visitor facilities at the site.

The footpath for Chapel Hill is accessed via a large wooden farm gate, which is kept in place with a chain. The gate needs to be pushed open and closed again, and secured with the chain.



Farm gate leading to footpath

It is approximately 50 metres up a moderate hill to the top of Chapel Hill. The footpath is grass, which is usually kept short. The path is uneven, has overgrown verges and has a number of rabbit holes. It can be slippery when wet. The path is narrow, and steep in some sections. Keep to the left hand, narrower footpath. See photos for more details.



Photos showing footpath leading to Chapel Hill



Once at the top of Chapel Hill the archaeological features can be explored. You will enter the site from the east. The features encompass the entire hill top, with the Iron Age hill fort wall encompassing the area. The Viking Ship burial is now visible as a boat-shaped group of white stones at the entrance to the site. The ancient keeill is located to the west end of the site, with the original walls surviving to a low height. There are a number of metal plaques around the site which indicate the features of note. There are a series of grass paths to follow, which are usually kept short. The paths are uneven and contain rabbit holes.



Aerial view of Chapel Hill, Balladoole showing the archaeological features



Example of the network of mown grass paths to explore the site



Further Information:

Please observe the Isle of Man Country Code when visiting ancient monuments in the landscape. This is to protect yourselves, the wildlife, farm animals, and to preserve the natural beauty of the Manx countryside.

Please remember that you are responsible for your own safety and for others in your care, so dress appropriately, wear stout footwear, be prepared for changes in weather and other events. We recommend letting someone else know where you are going and when you expect to return. Remember to bring your mobile phone with you, but don't assume you will always get reception at some of the more remote sites.

If you would like to speak to a member of our team about visiting Chapel Hill, Balladoole or other ancient monument sites please email: enquiries@mnh.im.

For more detailed information about the site please see 'A Guide to the Archaeological Sites of the Isle of Man up to 1500AD' by Andrew Johnson and Allison Fox (Culture Vannin, 2017), available to purchase from the Manx Museum Gallery Shop and online:

www.manxnationalheritage.im