

Andy Murray

Criffel Hill



Writers' Walks



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Andy Murray was a journalist for most of his life and discovered a passion for story telling which he has since turned into poetry.

He won the Wigtown Fresh Voice Award in 2022 and Drunk Muse published his first collection in 2021, 'The Fisherman's House'.





Writers' Walks



Criffel Hill

There has always been something about Criffel that has stirred my soul and, nowadays I can often be spotted sitting in my garden gazing at its beauty on the skyline. I've sat at the summit umpteen times; I've variously jogged up it, walked up it, used it as a viewpoint or a hangover cure. I've written doggerel up there, and made great plans, long since abandoned. It is probably the single most conspicuous mini-mountain in southwest Scotland, making the most of its relatively short height (570 m, 1,870 feet). You see, it has its base at sea level or thereabouts and is relatively isolated.

An ascent of Criffel offers a mix of fresh air, history, bird life and some of the most stunning views south of Ben Lomond. You can start at the magnificent ruins of 13th-century Sweetheart Abbey, where Lady Devorgilla is buried with her husband John Balliol's embalmed heart. En route to the hilltop, you've the option of visiting the Waterloo monument that honours Wellington's soldiers who defeated the French. You have Loch Kindar on your way to the top, which has three islands in it, one of which has the remains of an old church.

On a clear day the views from the top of Criffel are exceptional. You can pinpoint the Moffat hills and some of the Cheviots. You can spot the Pennines, the peaks of the Lake District, Goat Fell on Arran, the Isle of Man, the Galloway and Lowther Hills.



Criffel Hill
walkhighlands.co.uk

On the Hill

Crooning skylarks chirrup over Criffel hill,
and, like mini-helicopters,
skim the spurs
of Knockendoch and Maidenpap.
Hovering above blaeberry bushes
that burst from boggy drumlins.

Down there the sea heads for the Atlantic.
Perfectly Palaeozoic,
the coast's chameleon Corbett.
Everybody's favourite hill.
An emblem of nether Galloway,
it seems to have grown out of the estuary.

Criffel's an old pal.
A beacon. A reassuring landmark.
I see it every bright morning from my garden.
Big or shortened,
blue or grey or blurred,
depending on the weather.

Wordsworth saw it from his lofty lakelands,
way out there in England across the water,
and in a homage to Burns he wrote of its "huge hoary top".
For Thomas the Rhymer 'in the evil day coming
safely shall nowhere be found
except atween Criffel and the sea'.

The first time we climbed it we were sweet 16.
We took his advice.
We descended to zero feet above sea level,
to the safety of Sweetheart Abbey,
and a few illicit jars of 80 shillings
in the nearest pub that would have us.