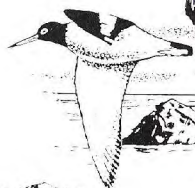
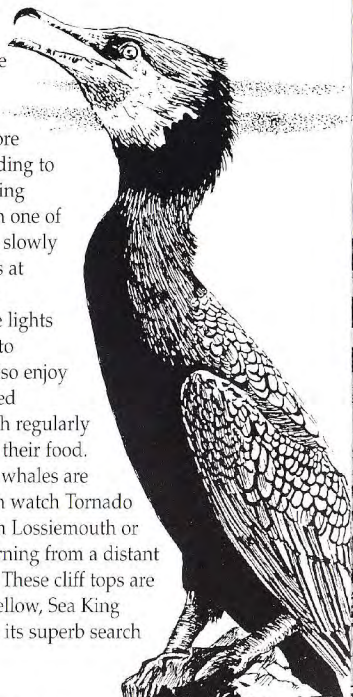


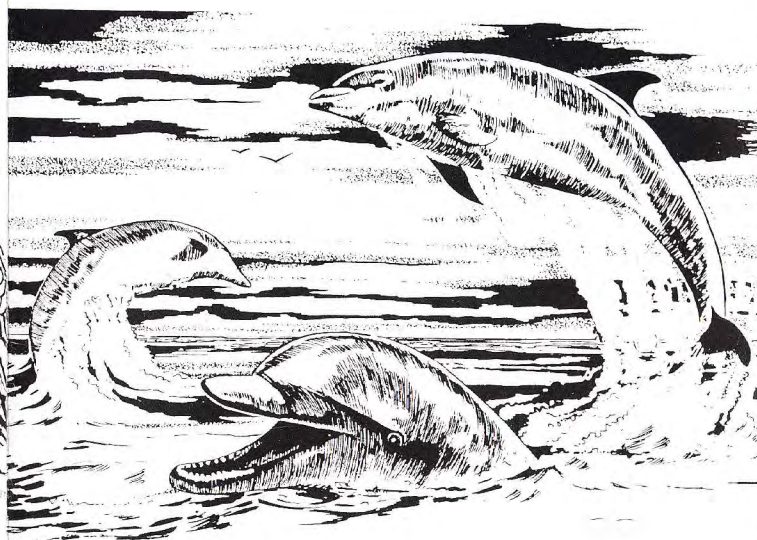
Portknockie has its own Doric word for gulls which local people call "pules". Swimming around the Rock in early summer you may also see the wedge-shaped Eider Ducks that breed in this area. The males are striking in their white and black plumage while the females are a dull brown.

Overhead from the cliff top, opposite Bow Fiddle Rock, you will hear and see Larks climbing into the sky. Other birds favouring this spot include Linnets, Stone Chats, Yellow Hammers, Rock Pipits, Sand Martins, Partridges and Crows. Offshore you will see passing fishing boats heading to and from Buckie, the nearest fish-landing harbour. In the distance you may catch one of the huge North Sea oil-rigs lumbering slowly from the construction and repair yards at Nigg in Cromarty Firth, north-west of Portknockie. At night, you can see the lights of the Beatrice rig, the nearest oilfield to Portknockie. On occasion, you may also enjoy the tumbling of the famous bottle-nosed dolphins and harbour porpoises, which regularly pass the Bow Fiddle Rock in search of their food. More rarely common seals and minke whales are observed here. In the air, you can often watch Tornado and Jaguar fighters out practising from Lossiemouth or one of the four-engined Nimrods returning from a distant maritime patrol to its base at Kinloss. These cliff tops are also a favourite practice area for the yellow, Sea King helicopters that provide Scotland with its superb search and rescue service.



Shell middens offered some explanation of what people were eating then. The main occupation horizon also yielded evidence of metal-working, including mould fragments and the parts of bowl furnaces. More recent finds indicated that there had been a house built there in the Middle Ages and that, during the nineteenth century, the area was paved with flat stones for drying fish and nets. The only visible remains now are the concrete foundations of a shed, which housed explosives used during the enlarging of Portknockie harbour in the late 1880s.

Access to the "fort" was by a natural causeway, which is now cut by the track leading down to the Harbour. The 24m high cliffs would have offered the local inhabitants sound protection against attack from the sea. The stone-built rampart protected the landward side of the site. The Green Castle was not as substantial a fortification as the one at Burghead (35km westwards) with the site covering less than 1000m<sup>2</sup>. However, the builders did use similar construction techniques, building oak-framed walls with squared vertical and horizontal timbers. The existence of this ancient site does suggest that settlers along this stretch of the Moray Firth coastline have long recognized the significance of Portknockie as a good place to live and one providing a safe haven.

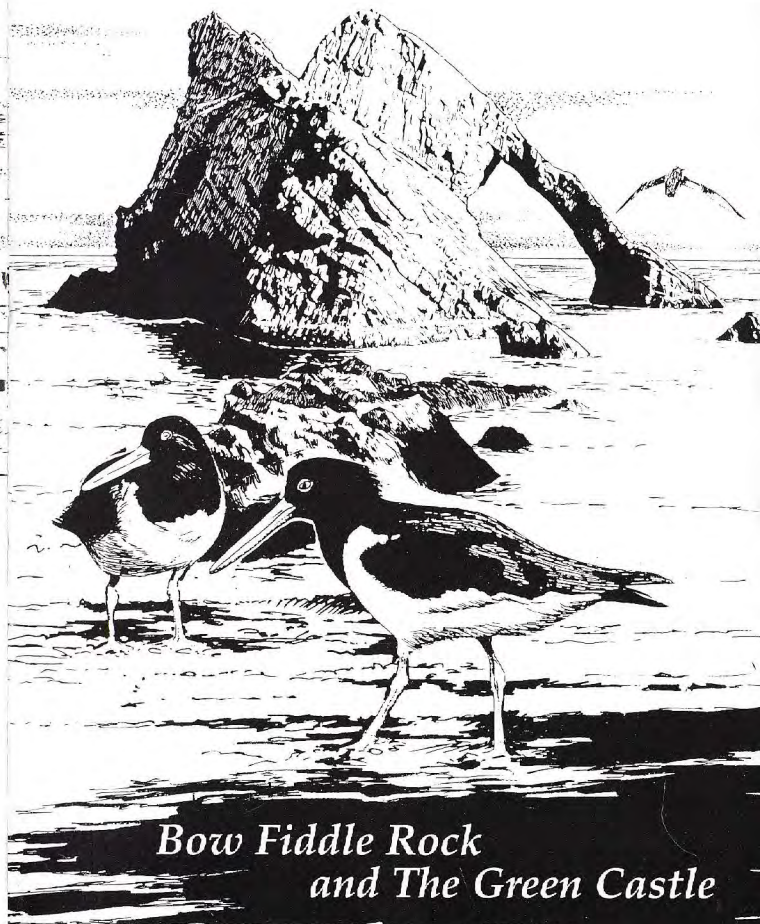


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*Bow Fiddle Rock  
and The Green Castle*

## BOW FIDDLE ROCK

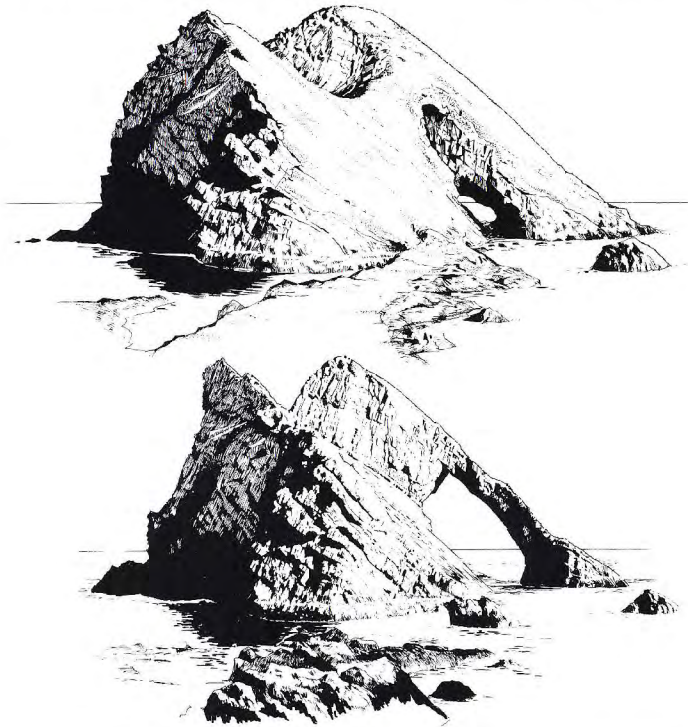
The spectacular Bow Fiddle Rock at Portknockie is the village's most visited tourist attraction. Along this stretch of the Moray Firth coast the sea has carved prominent caves, arches and sea stacks in the steeply folded Cullen quartzite rocks.

This is the same rock, which forms the hill of the Bin of Cullen to

the south of Portknockie. These light gray rocks are very old dating from a geological period known as the Lower Dalradian. The thickly bedded rocks originated as layers of sandstone and limestone and they were formed in shallow seas over 650 million years ago. During the time when the Grampian Mountains were being formed these sedimentary rocks were folded and hardened by the pressures of tectonic activity and changed into quartzites. Bow Fiddle Rock is a much-photographed element of the huge Caledonian fold belt, which stretches right across Scotland from through to Shetland, Norway and Spitsbergen.

Bow Fiddle Rock provides a classic example of a sea stack with a dramatic natural arch. It has been formed from steeply folded beds of quartzite that dip in a SE direction. Less resistant bands of mica schist rock would have been eroded by wave action to form first a cave and then a full arch. In time, this arch too will collapse as it succumbs to the destructive power of coastal erosion. Does its unusual shape remind you of a violin bow?

The Rock looks white from the layers of bird droppings left over the years by the gulls that nest there. You will see Herring Gulls, Great Black-backed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. The brown, speckle-coated gulls, crying for food, are adolescent birds under four years of age. You will also see Fulmers flying along the cliff-face and, occasionally Gannets diving for fish in the sea. Somewhat apart from the noisy gulls, the Cormorants and Shags sit brooding on the rocks in characteristic pose. When the older men in the village were boys it was one of the rites of passage in the spring-time to jump across to Bow Fiddle Rock to search for gulls eggs.



## THE GREEN CASTLE

Green Castle Hill is the local name for the flat-topped promontory opposite Rock House between Portknockie harbour and the Three Creeks shore. Archaeological excavations in the 1980s, led by an Aberdeen University team, found that this site dated to the Iron Age (1000 BC) and was still in use by Pictish peoples up until around 1000AD. On this cliff top are the remains of a defensive earthwork, similar in style to the Pictish promontory forts which have been discovered along the NE Scottish coastline at Burghead, Cullykhan (Castle Point), Troup, Dundarg, Dunottar and Castle Rock (Auchmithie). It seems likely that from this promontory fort the locals would have caught sight of the Viking longboats as they first ventured into the Moray Firth.

The remains (now re-covered) indicate that there were several buildings with oak-framed walls showing evidence of burning, some timber and stone ramparts and various post-holes for roof supports. The main defensive feature was a Dark Age, timber-laced rampart, which overlaid an earlier palisade fence line. Fragments of glass beads and rings, jet

bracelets and pottery were also found and there was pollen evidence that the area had been ploughed, at some time, for growing oats.

