

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Bellabeg-Doune of Invernochty Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

An easy walk in the scenic Strathdon valley, with great views and points of historical interest to enjoy. This hill farming area, at the edge of the Grampian Mountains, forms part of the Cairngorms National Park, and has been a vital passageway for people since Pictish times.

Duration: 2 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: There is a very limited Stagecoach #219 bus service to Bellabeg from Alford. Check timetables. Park in the small car-park at the walk start/end point (near the entrance to the access road to Lost farm).

Length: 5.980 km / 3.74 mi

Height Gain: 149 meter. **Height Loss:** 149 meter.

Max Height: 340 meter. **Min Height:** 282 meter.

Surface: Moderate. A fair amount of walking on tarred road surfaces.

Otherwise, good paths and forest tracks. Not suitable for off-road mobility scooters as at March 2022 due to fallen trees between Waypoints 13 and 16.

Child Friendly: Yes, if children are used to walks of this distance and overall ascent.

Difficulty: Easy.

Dog Friendly: Yes, on lead on public roads and near farm animals.

Refreshments: The Goodbrand and Ross Tearoom in Corgarff is about 7 miles away on the A944. Otherwise, options in Alford.



Description

This is a very pleasant ramble around and about the hamlet of Bellabeg in the remote area of Upper Donside known as Strathdon, where hill farming and forestry are the main local industries. There are fine open views to appreciate throughout most of the walk. Bellabeg, once called Invernochty, sits at the confluence of the Water of Nochty, running down from the Ladder Hills, and the River Don, flowing from its source in the mountainous Ben Avon moorlands. De-population has been a feature of Strathdon for the last 150 years, with the



term "[Land of the Lost](#)" playing on the name of Lost Farm, near Bellabeg. Each year, in late August, the Lonach Highlanders gather here in highland dress to celebrate their neighbourly cohesion and the history of their community. Their annual "march" through the parish is famously punctuated with drams of whisky at friendly stops along the way! Our more sober route makes an early visit to the churchyard of the impressive Strathdon Kirk where there are some interesting early gravestones and a curious mausoleum in Egyptian style. A diversion onto a bluff overlooking Bellabeg in the Bunzeach Forest provides not only a wonderful view over the settlement and Glen Nochty but also the opportunity to participate in the Cairngorms National Park "Photo-Posts" Project which aims to record changing landscapes over the seasons at a number of locations in the Park. The next point of interest is crossing Poldullie Bridge, a rare and captivating example of a single arch stone bridge, constructed in 1715. Unlike many of its neighbours, the bridge survived the catastrophic "Muckle Spate" of August 1829. Rising through mature pine forest, the walk then achieves a fine viewpoint over the upper Strathdon valley and the high moors above Deeside, to the south. Near the end of the walk we pass the Doune of Invernochty, the massive earthwork "motte and bailey" remains of a 12thC Norman fortress.

Waypoints

(1) Start walk from small car-park just off the Lost Farm access road

(57.20414; -3.07252) NJ3528813106

<https://w3w.co/unguarded.clinic.presume>

Start the walk from the small car-park just off the road to Lost Farm, a very short distance from the A944 road. Note, the entrance to this public road (signposted 'Lost!'), is on the right of the A944 road if you are travelling from the north, Mossat/Kildrummy/Glenkindie direction, a short distance over the Water of Nochtly bridge in the centre of Bellabeg (don't take the earlier road, before the bridge, signposted for Lost Gallery). At the edge of the car-park is an information board about moorlands. From the car-park, turn left and walk a few metres, passing the war memorial on your right, to the pavement on the A944 road. Turn left and walk towards the Nochtly bridge, but do not cross it.



(2) Right off A944 and down minor road before Water of Nochtly bridge

(57.20405; -3.07139)

In about 100 m, just before the bridge over the Water of Nochtly, turn right to cross the main A944 road and follow the minor road, signed for Weak Bridge, passing the Doune sheltered housing complex on your right as you head out of the village. This is a very quiet road, but please do take care to walk on the right side of the road/verge, facing any oncoming traffic. (106 m)



(3) Divert left to check out Strathdon Parish Church

(57.20110; -3.06947)

After a little less than 400 m, we suggest you divert left to check out the fine Strathdon Parish Church building and interesting old graveyard*. When you are ready, return to the church entrance gate and go left to continue gently uphill on the tarred minor road. (477 m)

**Note: 'The kirkyard contains a Tardis-like red granite ashlar Egyptian mausoleum of two storeys built for Mary Forbes, wife of Daniel Mitchell, 1829: the spare elegance suggests Archibald Simpson's hand, designer of nearby Castle Newe for Forbeses, 1831. Other stones of interest include a winged soul (Donald McSween, on wall of kirk) and a primitive grim reaper in relief.' Taken from 'Aberdeenshire: Donside and Strathbogie - An Illustrated Architectural Guide', by Ian Shepherd.*

See also: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/112399/strathdon-strathdon-parish-church>



(4) Go left at t-junction - signed for Waterside

(57.20070; -3.06948)

A little further on from the church up the tarred minor road you will arrive at a t-junction. Go left here in the direction signposted for Waterside (and the Bunzeach Trail). (665 m)



(5) Veer right and uphill at the Bunzeach signposts

(57.20012; -3.06689)

In just 180 m, or so, from the Waterside-signed junction, veer right off the tarred minor road onto a forest track at an information board and walk signposts, heading gently uphill. (839 m)



(6) Sharp right and uphill - reversing direction

(57.19759; -3.06408)

In 350 m, at a large open clearing, turn sharp right, back on yourself, to take the track heading gently uphill, now in the direction of Bellabeg. Some way up this track there is a gate on your left for the Bunzeach-Coullick Hill Circuit walk. Ignore this gate and carry on taking the track you are on as views of Bellabeg and its environs gradually open up ahead of you. Soon you will come upon a Cairngorms Park Authority post on your right. (1.2 km)



(7) Cairngorms Photo Post viewpoint

(57.19994; -3.06877)

In 400 m you will arrive at a marvellous viewpoint above Bellabeg and towards Glen Nochy/ Ladder Hills. Here, you will find a Cairngorms National Park 'photo post'* where you may choose to participate in the Cairngorms photo-post project by taking a photo from the post location and uploading that photo to the appropriate web page. When you are ready, carry on a short distance as the track becomes a footpath going uphill towards a bench at the edge of the trees. (1.6 km)



**Note: The Photo-Posts Project aims to record changing landscapes over the seasons, and over a 10 year period from 2015, at a number of locations in the Cairngorms National Park. For the Bellabeg location see: <https://bit.ly/2Kos0Mk>*

(8) Doune of Invernochty viewpoint

(57.19990; -3.06989)

In 70 m, or so, from the Cairngorms photo-post, you will arrive at an inscribed bench where there is another great view down to Bellabeg and beyond. In the centre of your view, just over the main A944 road is the Doune of Invernochty, the impressive earthworks remains of a 12th Century castle (you will visit The Doune, and obtain more information, towards the end of the walk). When you are ready, re-trace your steps all the way downhill and back to the minor tarred road you left at Waypoint 5. Turn left there to head back in the direction of Bellabeg. (1.7 km)



(9) Carry straight on for Poldullie Bridge

(57.20060; -3.06948)

In 900 m from the bench viewpoint you will have arrived at the road junction just above the Strathdon Parish Church. Here, you take the 'high road' to carry straight on in the direction signposted for Poldullie Bridge (note the different spelling on this particular walks signpost!?). Carry on taking this minor road as it winds gently uphill to some trees, high above the River Don. (2.6 km)



(10) Turn right to take access road to Poldullie Bridge

(57.19825; -3.07325)

In 400 m, turn right to take the narrow access road to Poldullie Bridge, with the River Don below you on your right. (3.0 km)



(11) Cross Poldullie Bridge

(57.19868; -3.07963)

In 500 m you will arrive at the very impressive old Poldullie Bridge*, with an inscription dated 1715. After taking in the fine views up and downstream, cross the bridge and follow the rough road uphill, past a house on your left, to the A944 road. (3.5 km)

**Note: '... Poldullie Bridge is one of the best surviving examples of an 18th century single semi-circular arch stone bridge. Unlike many of its neighbours, the bridge survived the catastrophic flooding of August 1829, known as the Muckle Spate. The man behind Poldullie, John Forbes, also known as 'Black Jock', was the bailie of Kildrummy and a close associate of John Erskine, the Earl of Mar. Erskine led the Jacobites against the British Government forces at Sherriffmuir in November 1715, having planned the campaign at Kildrummy Castle and raised the Jacobite standard at Braemar Castle ...' from: <https://aberdeenvoice.com/2015/08/community-marks-jacobite-bridge-tercentenary/>*

See also: <https://bit.ly/2KgrzRL>



(12) Right onto verge of A944 road

(57.19787; -3.08042)

In 150 m from Poldullie Bridge, turn right to walk along the verge of the A944 road. Note, the A944 road to Tomintoul can be busy, so take care. Walk on the right to face oncoming traffic. (3.65 km)



(13) Left off A944 road and up track at side of Strathdon School

(57.19978; -3.07947)

In 250 m, just as you arrive at the Strathdon Primary School, turn left to cross the A944 and take a rough track going gently uphill, with the school wall on your right and trees on your left. (3.9 km)



(14) Left onto Roughpark viewpoint track

(57.20034; -3.08013)

In about 80 m, at a walks post, go left and uphill through the trees on the Roughpark viewpoint track. (3.98 km)



(15) Roughpark viewpoint bench

(57.19741; -3.08570)

In 500 m you will have emerged from the woodland, with a superb south-facing view on your left over a field and down to the farm/hamlet of Roughpark. Beyond are the forested and heather-clad hills on the north side of upper Deeside. Here you will find another inscribed bench, a great place for a little picnic, particularly on a sunny day! When you are ready, retrace your steps down through the wood to the paths junction near Strathdon School. At that point carry straight on, taking the path back to Bellabeg, passing the school buildings on your right. Further down the path you will come across a trio of attractive little lochans, a haven for wildlife. (4.5 km)



(16) Veer right and through gate to divert to The Doune

(57.20355; -3.07529)

After 1 km, just before the path becomes a boardwalk for a short stretch, Take the grassy path on your right and go through the pedestrian gate to enter the area of the Doune of Invernochty, the earthworks remains of an 12th Century castle. Keep following the path, with the old moat (now a grassy depression) on your right until you come to a bench near to the A944 road. It is up to you if you attempt to climb the steep banks of the Doune to the top (we didn't!). (5.5 km)

**Note: '... Invernochty Castle was built upon a natural mound formed from glacial rock. By the ninth century AD it was a Pictish settlement and in the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries it was carved into a substantial Norman-style fortress by the Earl of Mar. The castle itself consists of a mound some twelve metres tall ... Around the early thirteenth century Kildrummy Castle was built as a replacement for Invernochty as it was better located for controlling the key routes into Buchan and Moray. Nevertheless the Parish church, on top of the mound, was still in use during the seventeenth century. The site was briefly used as an observation post during World War II and today it is noteworthy as the only known Norman earthwork castle in Scotland that has a stone structure of Norman origin on its summit ...'*

Thanks to: http://www.castlesfortsbattles.co.uk/grampian/doune_invernochty.html

Also see: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/16762/doune-of-invernochty>

(17) Bench beneath The Doune

(57.20287; -3.07391)

In 140 m, at the bench, re-trace your steps to the wooden gate and re-join the boardwalk/path, heading back to your start point in Bellabeg. Note that the avenue of 42 lime trees on your left in the grassy park were planted as a memorial to the 42 Strathdon men who lost their lives during the 1st and 2nd World Wars. (5.64 km)



(18) End of walk back at little car-park off the Lost road

(57.20421; -3.07264)

In 360 m, you will have arrived back at your start point in the little car-park off the road to Lost farm, having passed an information board for the Doune of Invernochty. (6.0 km)



Route Map



Links:

[Photos from walk](#)

[Download Route Guide](#) (PDF with illustrated Waypoints)

[Download GPX file](#) (GPS Exchange Format)

[Access Walk on OutdoorActive](#)

[Access Walk on OSMaps](#)

[Access Walk on AllTrails](#)

[Access Walk on Wikiloc](#)