

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Castle Fraser Ramble (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

A varied walk through the woodland and farmland policies surrounding an iconic Scottish castle. The castle is viewed from a range of perspectives alongside fine views of the countryside. The pond area is a delight, and there are interesting historical structures on the route.

Duration: 2.5 hours



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: There is no bus service close to Castle Fraser. National Trust Scotland car-park (charges apply for non-members).

Length: 7.420 km / 4.64 mi

Height Gain: 143 meter **Height Loss:** 143 meter

Max Height: 136 meter **Min Height:** 88 meter

Surface: Moderate. Mostly good estate roads and woodland paths. Not suitable for off-road mobility scooters due to stepped paths. It is possible to enjoy the Castle grounds by staying on estate roads. The path to the Flight Pond and back is probably OK.

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

Difficulty: Easy. **Dog Friendly:** Yes. Must be on lead on public access road and around any cattle or sheep encountered.

Refreshments: Good NTS cafe accessed from the castle courtyard.



Description

This is a wonderful opportunity to take a gentle ramble through the designed landscape of a Scottish baronial estate, with mature woodland, farmland, a pond, and walled kitchen garden. Clearly the focal point of the walk is Castle Fraser itself, a visually stunning landmark, which features at more than one point on the route. It is probably the grandest example of its type in Scotland. The construction of the elaborate, five-storey "Z-plan" castle was begun in 1575, although there is evidence of an older, much simpler tower dating from the previous century. Of course, the best way to appreciate the history of the castle, and the wider Scottish historical context is to visit the interior. This walk joins and extends the two established trails on the estate (Alton Brae and Miss Bristow's) in a way that provides interest alongside some impressive vistas. In particular, the unusual approach to the Flight Pond allows great views to open up to the Bennachie and Menaway Hills to the north and west. The Pond area is a delightful sanctuary. It was created in the 19th Century, in low-lying bog, to attract wildfowl for shooting, but the area is now a peaceful haven for wildlife. Amongst the flora and fauna to look out for is the rare Northern Damselfly. Interesting structures on the route include: Miss Bristow's monument; the Moses Well; a memorial to the last male Fraser of the direct line of Lairds of Fraser; and, the Walled Garden, in itself so evocative of past times. Along the way, there is also an opportunity to check out the castle courtyard, where there is a cafe, toilets, a gift shop, and a 2nd hand book shop.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk in car-park at Castle Fraser

(57.20548; -2.46013) <https://w3w.co/oblige.spout.dreading>
With your back to the covered entrance to the children's play area on the south side of the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) car-park, walk to your right, in an easterly direction, towards the end of the car-park and away from the Castle.



(2) Leave car-park by small gate

(57.20555; -2.45959) <https://w3w.co/deals.dwelled.inflation>
In 35 m, or so, at the eastern end of the NTS car-park, go through the pedestrian gate and follow the path, with trees on your right initially, and open fields on your left. Keep following this path (part of the Alton Brae Trail) for about 450 m. (35 m)



(3) Take path to left by gates

(57.20533; -2.45299) <https://w3w.co/rucksack.brands.luckier>
After 450 m, approaching trees ahead of you, take the path to your left just after the steel gates. Follow this path as it winds through the trees, with fields close by on your left side. (486 m)



(4) Left onto estate road

(57.20918; -2.45576) <https://w3w.co/aware.gosh.windmills>
After 500 m, the path joins the estate road. Go left here, to follow the estate road. (1.0 km)



(5) Carry straight on - ignore path on right down to pond

(57.20946; -2.45644) <https://w3w.co/planting.amplifier.student>

In just 50 m, or so, ignore the path on your right which descends to the Flight Pond (you will arrive at the pond by another route). Carry straight on, continuing to take the estate road as it gently descends through the trees. (1.0 km)



(6) Mackenzie-Fraser Memorial

(57.21036; -2.46180) <https://w3w.co/turkeys.ironic.ground>

In another 400 m you will arrive at a memorial to Colonel Frederick Mackenzie-Fraser who, dying childless in 1897, was the last male Fraser of the direct line of Lairds of Fraser. Carry on downhill on the estate road. (1.4 km)

See: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/339794/castle-fraser-policies-colonel-frederick-mackenzie-fraser-memorial>



(7) Straight on down road where paths cross

(57.21082; -2.46404) <https://w3w.co/hillside.outlast.thumbnail>

In another 100 m, or so, paths cross over the estate road to your right (downhill) and your left (uphill). Ignore these paths and carry on taking the estate road as it continues downhill, bypassing the North Lodge to join a tarred estate road at the perimeter of the estate grounds. (1.5 km)



(8) Right onto perimeter road

(57.21212; -2.46525) <https://w3w.co/cure.stamp.aliennated>

In 200 m, the rough estate road you are on veers to the right, away from the North Lodge, just ahead on your left, to form a t-junction with a tarred estate road at the perimeter of the Castle grounds. Go right onto this perimeter road. Soon, views open up on your left to the Bennachie and Menaway Hills to the north and west. (1.7 km)



(9) Right to pond area

(57.21199; -2.45674) <https://w3w.co/deploying.clipped.fact>

After 500 m, turn right at a passing place on the road and follow the narrow path through a chain-sawn gap in a fallen tree towards the pond area. (2.2 km)



(10) Right onto pond-side path

(57.21071; -2.45725) <https://w3w.co/static.grunt.nail>

In less than 200 m, turn right to follow the path alongside the delightful Flight Pond. The pond was created in the 19th Century, in an area of low-lying bog, to attract wildfowl for shooting, but the area is now a peaceful haven for wildlife. Look out for the rare Northern Damselfly. Keep following the path as it leaves the pond area to enter the mature conifer trees. (2.4 km)



(11) Across estate road and up path

(57.21075; -2.46407) <https://w3w.co/hillside.outlast.thumbnail>

In 400 m, go across the estate road at the point you passed at Waypoint 7 and ascend on the path, very soon using steps to assist the climb. (2.8 km)



(12) Veer right to stay on main path

(57.20885; -2.46257) <https://w3w.co/sting.flopping.absent>

In 300 m, or so, where a narrow path goes off to the left, veer slightly right to stay on the main path as it continues to gently ascend through a narrow belt of trees, with open fields now on either side. (3.1 km)



(13) Veer left and down towards castle

(57.20688; -2.46181) <https://w3w.co/taxed.spoons.lectured>
In another 200 m you will emerge from the path at a corner on the main access road to Castle Fraser. Veer slightly left here and descend gently towards the castle. There is an indistinct path by the fence on your left, but choose your own route, taking appropriate care if walking on the access road. Eventually, you will pass the walk start-point at the car-park, on your left. Carry on down towards the castle. (3.3 km)



(14) Short deviation left to memorial bench

(57.20390; -2.46062) <https://w3w.co/preheated.yell.collect>
In 400 m, just as you pass the bottom corner wall of the Walled Garden on your left, go left past the old servants toilet building for a few metres to check out a stone memorial bench to Lavinia and Major Michael Smiley*. Then, return to the narrow road and continue down towards the castle, just ahead of you. (3.7 km)

** Lavinia and Major Michael Smiley were the last private owners of Castle Fraser. They donated the castle and 26 acres of surrounding land to the National Trust for Scotland in 1976 (the NTS purchased a further 320 acres of the surrounding land in 1993, allowing the castle once more to sit as an integral part of a much wider estate).*



(15) Check out castle courtyard as you pass

(57.20342; -2.46054) <https://w3w.co/grows.onwards.hoops>
In another 100 m, or so, you will probably wish to check out the castle courtyard, where there is a cafe, toilets, a gift shop, and a 2nd hand book shop. The castle can also be visited (check latest NTS ticket prices if not a NTS member). When you are ready, go left to carry on following the narrow tarred road as it goes around the castle building to pass the south side. (3.8 km)



(16) Take right fork for Miss Bristow Trail

(57.20223; -2.45812) <https://w3w.co/shout.collision.brighter>
In about 300 m from the castle courtyard, at a fork in the estate roads, take the right fork (marked for the Miss Bristow's Trail). (4.1 km)



(17) Right onto woodland path

(57.20022; -2.45516) <https://w3w.co/snails.tailors.surveyors>
In another 300 m, as the rough road enters a wooded area, go right onto the woodland path, keeping the field on your right. (4.4 km)



(18) Sharp left and uphill at bench

(57.19994; -2.46110) <https://w3w.co/songs.clustered.bluffs>
In 400 m, or so, go sharp left and uphill at a viewpoint where there is an arrowed walks post*. (4.8 km)

* Note: the bench shown in our photo is no longer there.



(19) Miss Bristow's monument

(57.19901; -2.45790) <https://w3w.co/flagpole.assume.blaze>
After about 300 m gentle ascent through the trees you arrive at Miss Bristow's Memorial Stone*. After checking out the inscriptions, carry on past the monument. (5.1 km)

* the monument was erected, after her death in 1805, to commemorate the life of Miss Mary Bristow, long time friend and companion of the spinster lady Laird Elysa Fraser. Mary was much involved in improving the Castle Fraser estate with tree planting, etc. Other faces on the stone were inscribed later to commemorate Elysa's nephew Alexander, and Elysa herself.

See: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/83646/castle-fraser-miss-bristows-memorial>



(20) Left down estate road

(57.19688; -2.45392) <https://w3w.co/kite.jammy.boosted>
In 400 m, the path emerges onto the estate road you left earlier at Waypoint 17. Go left down the road. (5.5 km)



(21) Check out the Moses Well

(57.19745; -2.45391) <https://w3w.co/etchings.stolen.detail>
In another 65 m, don't miss, on your right, the path to access, firstly and almost immediately, a stone drinking fountain, then, just a little further into the trees, a "barrel vault" stone well building known as Moses Well*. There are stone panels with biblical figures carved in deep relief to each side, said to have come from the Castle. When you are ready, return to the estate road and continue on. (5.6 km)

*See: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/277716/castel-fraser-estate-moses-well-drinking-fountain>



(22) Left off road onto path

(57.19833; -2.45395) <https://w3w.co/roadblock.thin.patrolled>
In about 100 m, go left off the estate road onto a path through the trees that runs parallel with the road on your right, and with the little stream on your left side. This very pleasant path eventually emerges back onto the estate road, which you will follow out of the woods to pass between fields again, on the route back towards the castle. (5.7 km)



(23) Sharp right at junction before castle

(57.20222; -2.45803) <https://w3w.co/shout.collusion.brighter>
In 600 m, at a y-junction, with the road to the castle veering left, go sharp right to walk the rough estate road away from the castle again, this time in an easterly direction. (6.3 km)



(24) Left up road to Gardeners Cottage

(57.20368; -2.45498) <https://w3w.co/chicken.unpainted.bullion>
In 200 m, or so, take the turning on your left heading across the Castle Fraser events field towards the gated entrance to the Gardener's Cottage. (6.5 km)



(25) Veer right for gate

(57.20454; -2.45570) <https://w3w.co/clerk.listings.relaxing>

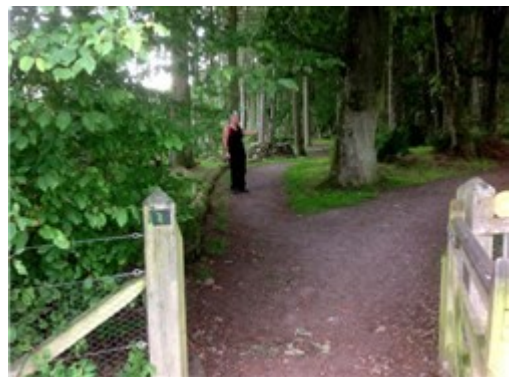
In 100 m, veer right away from the (private) gated entrance to the Gardener's Cottage to go through another gate that will take you onto the path you were on very early in the walk. Go left onto that path, heading back towards the car-park. (6.6 km)



(26) Take left fork after wooden pedestrian gate

(57.20547; -2.45733) <https://w3w.co/listed.betrayed.kilowatt>

In about 200 m, enter through the pedestrian gate and take the left fork through the play and activity area in the trees. Follow the path towards the walled garden, passing the low toilets building, looking for the entrance to the walled garden on your left, just past the wooden NTS building on your right. (6.8 km)



(27) Check out walled garden

(57.20450; -2.45986)

<https://w3w.co/husband.nametag.amended>

In 200 m, go through the gate to check out the delightful walled garden (donations are appreciated). At the far side of the walled garden, in the middle, there is a door that takes you beyond the wall to a wide perennial flowers border. When you are ready, leave the garden by gate you entered it and head up past the wooden NTS building (checking it out, as inclined) to follow a path back to your start-point in the car-park. (7.0 km)



(28) Finish walk back at car-park

(57.20547; -2.46028) <https://w3w.co/oblige.spout.dreading>

After going through the covered entrance-way, you will finish the walk back in the NTS car-park. (7.4 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](#)