

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Craigievar Castle Ramble (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This is a delightful rural ramble in mixed countryside and woodland around and about the iconic Craigievar Castle, a popular and well-deserved visitor attraction. On a sheltered hillside, the natural environment is particularly favoured, and there are great views, near and far.

Duration: 2 hours.



Route Overview

Duration: 2.5 hours.

Transport/Parking: No public transport links nearby. There is a car-park where you start/finish the walk. National Trust for Scotland charges apply (free to members). Craigievar Castle is off the A980, 6 miles south of Alford and 26 miles west of Aberdeen.

Length: 6.260 km / 3.91 mi

Height Gain: 197 meter. **Height Loss:** 197 meter.

Max Height: 350 meter. **Min Height:** 209 meter.

Surface: Moderate. All the paths and tracks are well-maintained, although not surfaced. There may be muddy sections after rain. Steep gradients in places. Not suitable for off-road mobility scooters due to narrow uneven paths with high tree roots and boulders.

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

Difficulty: Medium.

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

Refreshments: There is a refreshments kiosk (The Barmkin) behind the castle. Options in Alford.



Description

This is a memorable walk in the grounds of Craigievar Castle, owned by the National Trust for Scotland. On the undulating route, which combines the signed Woodland and Hill trails with a diversion along the tree-lined South Drive, there are wonderful views, near and far, at every turn. With its eye-catching pink lime harling, the castle is a magnificent and intact example of early Scottish Baronial architecture. Replacing a 14th C fortified house, the castle was completed in 1626 by William Forbes, brother of the Bishop of Aberdeen. William was nicknamed Danzig Willy for his shrewd trading success with the Baltic states. Internally, Craigievar is particularly noted for its exceptionally crafted plasterwork ceilings. In modern times, the castle is reputed to have been one of the inspirations for Walt Disney's castle motif. The Castle sits on a protected position half way up the SE slope of Craigievar Hill, 6 miles from Alford, just off the A980 road. The landscape around the castle was extensively re-designed in the mid 19th C to integrate natural features with the position of the building and its immediate surrounds. At that time, Douglas Fir, Sequoia, and Monkey Puzzle trees were planted where the South Drive opens up to the castle, and these have matured into mighty and magnificent specimens. The castle grounds and Craigievar Hill are renown for the variety of fungi to be found, especially in late summer and autumn months. During the walk, in addition to the wonderful visual impact of the surrounding hills, woods and farmland, there are striking views to the Lochnagar mountain on the edge of the Cairngorms, and the distinctive Bennachie range, a dominating feature for so many parts of Aberdeenshire. For more information, see: <https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/craigievar>
<https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/alford/craigievar/index.html>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Craigievar_Castle



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Craigievar Castle car-park

(57.17619; -2.71729)

Start the walk at the National Trust car-park, heading back onto the North Drive access road, with the castle behind you. In about 100 to 150 m, walking away from the castle, look out for a walks indicator post on your right side.



(2) Right off access road for Woodland Trail

(57.17692; -2.71554)

In about 100 to 150 m, walking away from the castle on the tarred access/exit road, turn right to follow a narrow path downhill at a walks indicator post (blue arrow, for the Woodland Trail). Continue downhill through the trees until the path reaches the Leochel Burn where you turn right to take the path along the banks before the path turns right again to go back uphill towards the castle. (136 m)



(3) Go right when emerging onto Castle grounds

(57.17392; -2.71620)

After about 750 m, the woodland path down to the Leochel Burn has completed its circuit around a field to return back up to the grounds just below the castle. Take the right option and follow the path through the grass up to the castle access road. (896 m)



(4) Go left to pass the Castle on your right side

(57.17498; -2.71737)

In about 100 m, upon reaching the castle access road, turn left to follow the road past the castle, with the castle on your right side as you pass it. (1.0 km)



(5) Continue past Castle onto the South Drive

(57.17394; -2.71807)

After 200 m, having passed the castle on your right side, continue following the driveway, now making for the distinctive high trees ahead of you*. This is the original main access road to the castle, known as the South Drive. Keep following this rough road, passing through a fine avenue of mature trees and then farmland in order to reach a turning point at a minor, tarred road in about 900 m. There are some very good views of the surrounding countryside in this section. (1.2 km)

**Note: the trees in this section were planted during a re-landscaping of the castle grounds in the 1850s. Some are identified by tags on the lower trunk. They include very fine specimens of Douglas Fir, Sequoia Wellingtonia Gigantia, and Monkey Puzzle (Chilean Pine).*



(6) Turn and re-trace steps when South Drive meets minor tarred road

(57.16606; -2.72274)

In 900 m, where the old South Drive rises up to meet a minor tarred road by an old farmhouse on your left, turn around and re-trace your steps back towards the castle, enjoying a different perspective on the countryside views. (2.1 km)



(7) Veer left and gently uphill

(57.17289; -2.71813)

In just under 900 m, as you approach a y-junction, veer left to take the rough road going gently uphill. This will take you behind the castle towards some old cottages. (3.0 km)



(8) Left and uphill for the Hill Trail

(57.17479; -2.71892)

In 200 m, or so, after passing a first set of cottages, turn sharp left and uphill to follow the Hill Trail (there is a walks indicator post with a red arrow to guide you). (3.2 km)



(9) Divert to Kitchen Garden

(57.17440; -2.71973)

Very soon, in less than 100 m, divert left through a gate to check out the small Kitchen Garden. When you are ready, leave the garden at the wooden building slightly higher up the hillside and turn left to continue walking uphill on the Hill Trail towards the trees. (3.3 km)



(10) Left and uphill at y-junction above the Kitchen Garden

(57.17434; -2.72116)

In less than 100 m, soon after entering the wood (much of this area has been felled now), go left at the y-junction there. Continue following the main Hill Trail path up through the pine wood. (3.4 km)



(11) Lochnagar viewpoint

(57.17281; -2.72349)

In 400 m, the path diverts for a short distance to a viewpoint over an open field and beautiful surrounding countryside, where there is a bench. On a good day, you will see the distinctive shape of the Munro hill called Lochnagar, in the distance in a SW direction (look a little to your left side). When you are ready, return to the path and continue walking uphill. (3.8 km)



(12) Craigievar Hill summit

(57.17466; -2.72597)

In 300 m you will have arrived at the summit area of Craigievar Hill where there is a clearing surrounded by a low dry-stone wall*. Keep following the path over the top of the hill and into a mature conifer plantation. (4.1 km)

**Note: It is believed that the stone enclosure, probably an 18th Century 'folly', may have been created to represent an ancient sacred grove. A map from 1776 shows a single tree at its centre surrounded by others in concentric circles. None of these trees survive to the present day.*



(13) Left to continue on the Hill Trail

(57.17779; -2.72621)

After 500 m, walking gently downhill, you will arrive at a signposted t-junction where there is a short-cut path back to the castle on your right. In order to continue on the Hill Trail, take the path to the left as it descends gradually to the castle access road, turning right to join a forest road in about 300 m. (4.6 km)



(14) Right upon descending to the tarred Castle access road

(57.17790; -2.71153)

After a further 1.3 km descent, you will have arrive at the North Drive castle access road where you turn right to head back towards the NTS car-park where you started the walk. (5.9 km)



(15) Finish walk back at Castle car-park

(57.17619; -2.71743)

After 400 m, you will have completed the walk and returned to the Craigievar Castle NTS car-park where the route started. (6.3 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 OSMs](#)

[Access Walk on AllTrails](#)

[Access Walk on Wikiloc](#)