

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Craigshannoch-Old Turnpike Road Circular (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

An excellent half-day hill walk incorporating a good mix of pine forest, heather moorland and farmland environments. Along the way there are lots of opportunities to rub shoulders with the history and myth associated with the Bennachie range.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: No suitable public transport links nearby. Free Rowan Tree car-park at start of walk.

Length: 9.870 km / 6.17 mi

Height Gain: 379 meter **Height Loss:** 379 meter

Max Height: 462 meter **Min Height:** 142 meter

Surface: Moderate. Well maintained paths. The Old Turnpike Road section after Waypoint 11 may be muddy in places.

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: We can recommend the Old Post Office Tea Room in Chapel of Garioch (closed Mondays and Tuesdays). Otherwise - Lil' C's Bar-B-Q in Oyne and lots of options in Inverurie.



Description

The granite tor on Craigshannoch Hill is less commonly visited than its more popular sister peaks in the Bennachie range, Mither Tap and Oxen Craig. That's a shame because the walking environment to Craigshannoch and the spectacular views from the top are very similar to those of its neighbours. This route kicks off from the Rowan Tree car-park on the north side of the Bennachie Hills, ascends to the Bennachie plateau, then descends to the Back o'Bennachie car-park before making a very pleasant return along a now green section of the Old Turnpike Road from Aberdeen to Inverness. There are echoes of history and myth throughout the walk. On the initial climb the route joins the Maiden's Causeway, an ancient footpath to the Iron-Age fort on the Mither Tap with connotations of a maiden's pact with the Devil! Just off the path, at a favourite picnic spot, is Hosie's Well, where the spring waters are said to represent the tears of a soldier at the Battle of Harlaw in 1411, who died of a broken heart and was buried on the nearby hillside, lamenting lost love. Soon after, the path passes the two granite tors that make up Little John's Length, a hammock-like stretch of moorland where the giant, Jock o'Bennachie, took his rest. The focal point of the walk is then reached at Craigshannoch Tor (418 m) where there are fine views in all directions. On the cliffs under the summit is a cave where, in 1640, John Leith, Laird of Harthill Castle hid as he watched his home burn. After visiting the granite lintel quarry on Little Oxen Craig, abandoned after a waterspout destroyed the access road in 1891, the route descends to follow the green track on a stretch of the Old Turnpike Road, where coaches and horses once made their bumpy way from Aberdeen to Inverness.

See: <https://www.bailliesofbennachie.co.uk/bennapedia>



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at the Rowan Tree car-park

(57.30959; -2.51117)

At the end of the Rowan Tree car-park go left and uphill past the information boards and walkers' signs. Keep following the narrow path uphill through the forest, signposted at various points for 'Mither Tap and Maiden's Causeway'. Eventually the walking environment opens out with fine views of the Mither Tap above and ahead, and of the rolling Garioch countryside below and behind you.



(2) Hosie's Well

(57.29799; -2.53083)

After 1.9 km you will arrive at Hosie's Well*, just off the path on your right side, where there is an information board. When you are ready, carry on walking up the path. (1.9 km)

**Note: An interpretation of the name from Bennapedia - 'The Battle of Harlaw took place in 1411 on the sloping land to the west of Inverurie. Here the Earl of Mar and his men fought the Highlanders in a bloody battle. Hosie, a local man, was on his way to marry his bride when he was persuaded to fight in the battle instead, postponing his wedding. After the battle, he was imprisoned in a Hebridean dungeon for several years. Eventually he escaped and went to find his bride to be. While he was in prison she had married someone else. Hosie was heartbroken, and with nothing to live for, he died and was buried on the hill overlooking Mither Tap. The well near where he was buried is called "Hosie's Well" because it was believed that the water in the well is "nothing but Hosie's tears"...'.*

See: <https://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/bennapedia>



(3) Turn right to take the Craigshannoch path

(57.29715; -2.53089)

In about 100 m, at a walk signpost, go sharp right onto the path less clearly marked by a separate sign, for Craigshannoch. (2.0 km)



(4) Divert right for Little John's Length cairn

(57.29774; -2.53629)

After 300 m, divert right for a short distance to follow a path to a cairn. Here you have a fine view, looking downhill and slightly left of the two granite tors that represent Little John's Length*. When you are ready, re-trace your steps to the main path and carry on towards Craigshannoch. (2.3 km)

**Note: This is the hammock-like area of moorland between two small tors to the east of Craigshannoch, with a distance of 200m between them. According to legend it is the bed of the giant Jock o' Bennachie!*

See: <https://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/bennapedia>



(5) Right for Craigshannoch

(57.29675; -2.54008)

In another 400 m, at a t-junction go right for Carigshannoch. (2.7 km)



(6) Craigshannoch Tor

(57.29847; -2.54712)

In 500 m, or so, you will have arrived at the peak of Craigshannoch*. There are fine views all around - of the countryside below and of the other Bennachie tops. When you are ready, descend by the same path you climbed up. (3.2 km)

**Note: Craigshannoch means "hill of the foxes". This is an interesting top with a rocky summit and a line of cliffs descending to the north ... there is some fine rock scenery. About half way down the rocky "arête" is Harthill's Cave. It was here that the notorious John Leith, laird of Harthill, hid in 1640 as he watched his Castle burn having set fire to it to spite his creditors. See: <https://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/bennapedia>*



(7) Veer right and down - away from Craigshannoch

(57.29765; -2.54602)

In 100 m, or so, from the summit of Craigshannoch, veer right, to take the path going onwards in a southerly then westerly direction. Initially, the peak of Oxen Craig is prominent on the skyline straight ahead of you. (3.3 km)



(8) On meeting Oxen Craig path - go straight across it

(57.29768; -2.55859)

In 1 km, arriving at a x-roads, go straight across the signposted path for Oxen Craig to take the minor (unsigned) path for Little Oxen Craig. As you approach the low granite tor swing a little left, then right to go around the rocky outcrop. Follow the narrow and increasingly stony path down into the small quarry where there is an information board. (4.3 km)



(9) Little Oxen Craig quarry

(57.29826; -2.55955)

In 200 m you will have arrived at the information board beside Little Oxen Craig quarry*. When you are ready, take the path going in an easterly direction, back towards the main Oxen Craig path. (4.5 km)

**Note: from Bennapedia - '... view the beautifully cut lintel stones left here as well as the quarry face (note the drill holes) from whence they came. A local builder, Fordyce by name, quarried the stone here in the 19th century. Imagine having to climb up to that height each morning to start work, have no shelter from the elements and be paid by results. A road from the quarry enabled the stone to be taken to Oyne but in August 1891, what has been described as a waterspout hit the hill in this area washing away the road and leaving a massive ravine. The dressed stones could not be removed and have remained here ever since ...'*

See: <https://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/bennapedia>



(10) Left and downhill from Little Oxen Craig quarry

(57.29848; -2.55839)

In 75 m from the old quarry, upon meeting the main path to Oxen Craig, go left and downhill. Follow this path as it eventually enters the pine forest above the Back o'Bennachie car-parking area. Keep following all signs for Back o'Bennachie. When you reach the car-park, keep going gently downhill through the car-park and onto the tarred access road. (4.6 km)



(11) Right onto the Old Turnpike Road path

(57.31420; -2.56196)

After 2km walking downhill, leave the tarred access road to the Back o'Bennachie to go right through a gates signposted for walkers. You are now walking along a segment of what remains of the Old Turnpike Road* between Aberdeen and Inverness. (6.6 km)

**Note: from Heritage Paths - '... This path is part of the old Turnpike that ran between Aberdeen and Inverness and so must have been a well used carriage road at some point. Turnpikes were a set of roads that were built in the 18th and 19th century and were funded by tolls. It's thought that the name 'Turnpike' derives from a practice where travellers' way was barred by soldiers with pikes until they were turned. It is interesting to note that America continues to use the term for some roads. There is an old milestone located at the Newmains junction (GR 678 245), which indicates 'Inverness 80 miles', reflecting the fact that this was an old and very long coach road ...'*

See: <http://www.heritagepaths.co.uk/pathdetails.php?path=117>



(12) Veer left onto Horndoyne Farm bye-pass path

(57.31315; -2.54864)

In 800 m, veer slightly left to take the bye-pass path around the side of the Horndoyne Farm steading buildings. Soon after that, go straight across a minor tarred road and continue to follow the track of the Old Turnpike Road signposted for the Rowan Tree car-park. Watch out for the old milestone (80 miles to Inverness) as you pass by the large modern house at Newmains. Keep going, eventually passing some cottages as you approach the Rowan Tree car-park. (7.4 km)



(13) Finish walk back at the Rowan Tree car-park

(57.30963; -2.51105)

In 2.4 km, or so, you will have arrived back at the Rowan Tree car-park where you started the walk. (8.6 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](#)