

# The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

## Deer Abbey-Pitfour Lake Ramble (Aberdeenshire)

### Route Summary

A relatively easy walk with minimal overall ascent on good paths and estate roads. The route breaks into 3 main components – firstly, open outlooks from the old railway line; then the fascinating ruins of Deer Abbey; and finally, the picturesque beauty of Pitfour Lake.

Duration: 2.5 hours



### Route Overview

**Duration:** 2.75 hours.

**Transport/Parking:** Stagecoach services to Mintlaw (e.g. #60, Aberdeen to Ellon, then #67/#68, Ellon to Mintlaw). Check timetables. It is approx. 2 km to walk from the roundabout in Mintlaw to the walk start-point. At the walk start/end point there is a small car-park for walkers to Pitfour Lake on the minor road to Fetterangus, just off the A950 leaving Mintlaw for New Pitsligo. See Waypoint 1 for how to get there.

**Length:** 6.080 km / 3.80 mi

**Height Gain:** 93 meter **Height Loss:** 93 meter

**Max Height:** 80 meter **Min Height:** 39 meter

**Surface:** Smooth. Good paths and estate roads. Sections may be muddy after wet weather. There are 2 sections walking on the verge of the A950, before and after Deer Abbey. **\*\*\*Some walkers may not be comfortable walking on the verge of a busy A road. See Waypoint 4 for an alternative route.\*\*\***

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

**Difficulty:** Easy.

**Dog Friendly:** Yes, but keep dogs on lead near to livestock and wildfowl, and on the main A950 road.

**Refreshments:** Options in Mintlaw and in nearby Aden Country Park. The walk passes the Saplin Brae hotel where there is a bar and restaurant.



### Description

This easy and pleasant walk in open countryside, and on woodland and lakeside paths, holds lots of historical interest along the way. The first section of the route follows the track of the old Buchan railway line (Peterhead to Maud). The line was opened in the mid 19th Century but closed to passenger traffic in the Beeching cuts of the mid 20th Century. Nearing the mid-point of the walk, the route stops off at the fascinating ruins of Deer Abbey, built in the 13th Century, but abandoned after the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century. The Book of Deer (now held by Cambridge University) is associated with the Abbey's former library. It contains the first written examples of the Gaelic language and was created in the 10th Century. On the second part of the walk, the route meets the beautiful Pitfour Lake, covering more than 50 acres. With its four islands and three stone bridges, it was created in the mid 19th Century as the grand centre-piece of an opulent Scottish landed estate. On the lakeside we encounter a sadly dilapidated (at time of writing) 'folly' – in the form of a small replica Greek Doric temple, styled after the Temple of Theseus, and probably built around 1830. It contained a cold-water bath in which George, the fifth laird was believed to have kept alligators! Thankfully none survive, so you are safe to take the scenic grassy path close to the water's edge. At one point, the route ascends to a marvellous vantage point over the lake and the surrounding countryside before returning to the lakeside and back along the old railway line.



## Waypoints

### (1) Start walk at small car-park for Pitfour Lake off the A950

(57.52579; -2.03257) <https://w3w.co/rent.irony.rules>

The walk starts and ends at a small car-park for walkers to Pitfour Lake on the minor road to Fetterangus, just 80 m off the A950 leaving Mintlaw for New Pitsligo. This is approximately 2 km from the roundabout at the centre of the village of Mintlaw. From the car-park, do not cross the minor road for the path to Pitfour Lake (you will return that way). Instead, take the path leaving the car-park in the Mintlaw direction..



### (2) Turn sharp right onto old railway line path

(57.52612; -2.03096) <https://w3w.co/patio.repeating.glare>

In 120 m, at a junction with the old railway line path, turn sharp right along the path, walking in a westerly direction, away from Mintlaw. (123 m)



### (3) Cross road and go left to carry on the old railway line

(57.52559; -2.03222) <https://w3w.co/author.outbursts.fees>

In 100 m, or so, cross the busy A950 road with great care and re-join the old railway line path where there is an information board. Go right on the path of the old line, continuing out of the Mintlaw Station area into the countryside. (223 m)



#### (4) Keep going on track of old railway line

(57.52269; -2.04272) <https://w3w.co/scorecard.mixer.eager>  
In another 700 m, keep going\* along the track of the old railway line, ignoring a signed path\*\* to your right for Saplin Brae and Pitfour Lake. (931 m)

*\*Note: if you wish to avoid walking on the busy A950 road (for more than 1 km, in total) between Waypoints 5 and 7, turn right here to take the footpath for Saplin Brae. This misses out the visit to Deer Abbey at Waypoint 6. Re-join the route at Waypoint 7, reducing the overall route length by more than 1.5 km.*

*\*\*Note: for information, we have a report that the sign for Saplin Brae and Pitfour Lake is no longer in place at this waypoint.*



#### (5) Right here and over bridge

(57.52293; -2.05822) <https://w3w.co/headers.places.concluded>  
In 1 km, where the old railway line path meets a narrow road\*, go right and over the narrow bridge up to the junction with the A950 road. Go right at the A950 road to walk along the verge towards the high walls of Deer Abbey ahead of you on your right. (1.9 km)

*\*Note: for information, we have a report that the gate shown in the waypoint photo is no longer in place.*



#### (6) Deer Abbey

(57.52372; -2.05409) <https://w3w.co/rested.trinkets.petal>  
In about 300 m from leaving the old railway line, and walking along the A950 back in the direction of Mintlaw Station, you will arrive at the entrance to the fascinating and well signed ruins of Deer Abbey\*, built in the 13th Century, but abandoned after the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century. The Book of Deer, with the first written examples of the Gaelic language, is believed to have been created at an earlier monastery in Old Deer, established by St Drostan, in the 10th Century, and kept in Deer Abbey library whilst the abbey was in operation (it is now held at Cambridge University). When you are ready, return to the verge of the A950 road, go right and carry on walking back in the direction of Mintlaw Station. (2.2 km)

*\*Note: there is free access to the Abbey and opening times are to be found here - <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/deer-abbey/history/>*



#### (7) Cross road into grounds of Saplin Brae Hotel

(57.52492; -2.04682) <https://w3w.co/valve.fairy.tasteful>  
In 800 m, cross the A950 road with care to enter into the car-park and grounds of the Saplin Brae Hotel. With the hotel building (based on an old 18th Century coach-house) on your left, pass the buildings, taking an access road on a gentle up-slope. (3.0 km)





### (8) Veer right towards trees

(57.52584; -2.04664) <https://w3w.co/lodge.speakers.rekindle>  
In 100 m, or so, as you pass the rear of the hotel on your left, veer right past some trees to take the rough road through fields on either side, walking away from the hotel buildings. (3.1 km)



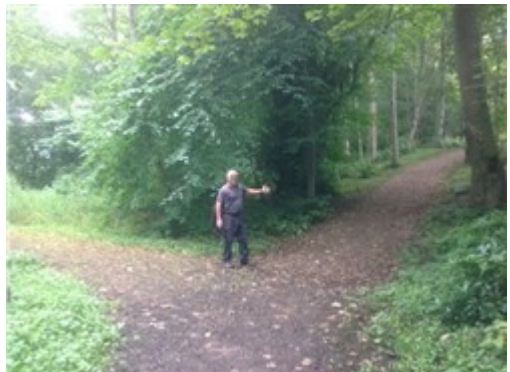
### (9) Right down path into trees

(57.52706; -2.04526) <https://w3w.co/obviously.payer.uniforms>  
In another 200 m, or so, go right, off the rough road, to take the path into the trees. (3.3 km)



### (10) Carry straight on

(57.52700; -2.04401)  
<https://w3w.co/computers.loudness.explains>  
In approximately 100 m, ignore the path on your left and carry straight on through the trees. (3.4 km)



### (11) Take left fork here

(57.52711; -2.04262) <https://w3w.co/swam.sheepish.passing>  
In 100 m, or so, at a clearing, take the path veering to your left, towards the lake. (3.5 km)



### (12) Go left at lake

(57.52753; -2.04237) <https://w3w.co/restored.prefer.universes>

In 50 m, or so, you will have arrived at the beautiful Pitfour Lake, covering more than 50 acres. With its four islands and stone bridges, it was created in the mid 19th Century as the grand centre-piece of an opulent Scottish landed estate. Go left along the rough road at the lakeside towards a small columned building (probably covered in scaffolding). (3.55 km)



### (13) Take lakeside path past temple and fishers hut

(57.52844; -2.04372) <https://w3w.co/fountain.generated.races>

In 100 m you will have arrived at a sadly dilapidated (at time of writing, Aug 2018) Pitfour Estate 'folly'. It is a small replica Greek Doric temple, styled after the Temple of Theseus. Its exact date of construction is unknown, but according to Historic Scotland, it was built 'probably circa 1835'. It contained a cold-water bath in which George, the fifth laird was believed to have kept alligators! Thankfully none survive, so you are safe to carry on past the temple and the nearby fishers' hut, taking the scenic grassy path close to the water's edge. Soon you will re-join the rough estate road you encountered at Waypoint 12. Carry on taking this road. (3.65 km)



### (14) Veer right to continue on main estate road

(57.53065; -2.04745) <https://w3w.co/clockwork.absorb.worms>

In 250 m from the temple, veer right to continue on the main estate road and at the next junction go right to pass behind the old kennels building, now a private residence. Carry on taking what becomes a (rough and cracked) concrete surfaced narrow road. There are marvellous open views on your right, down to the lake, and beyond. (4.1 km)



### (15) Veer left away from concrete surfaced road

(57.53225; -2.04066) <https://w3w.co/nasal.downward.envisage>

In 600 m, veer away slightly left from the concrete road. At the time of writing (Aug 2018), some limited construction of new houses was ongoing and the concrete road you were on is barred at this point. Continue taking the road through the trees behind the large building plots, soon passing a house on your left. (4.6 km)



### (16) Right and down towards lake

(57.53264; -2.03578)

<https://w3w.co/volunteered.tight.workloads>

In 300 m, go right and take the road going gently downhill towards the lake. Cross the bridge and carry on taking the road. (4.9 km)



### (17) Left after crossing second bridge

(57.52769; -2.03704)

<https://w3w.co/outsmart.marshes.situation>

In 700 m, having crossed a second, smaller bridge, turn immediately left and take the track along the side of the lake. Keep taking this track/path alongside the lake, ignoring any turn-offs to you right. Eventually the path will turn away from the lake through the trees towards a minor public road. (5.6 km)



### (18) Veer left across road for car-park

(57.52592; -2.03283) <https://w3w.co/belt.spring.drawn>

In 400 m, at an opening and gate onto a minor public road, take care and veer left across the road, to return to your start-point in the small car-park. (6.1 km)



### (19) Finish walk back at the car-park

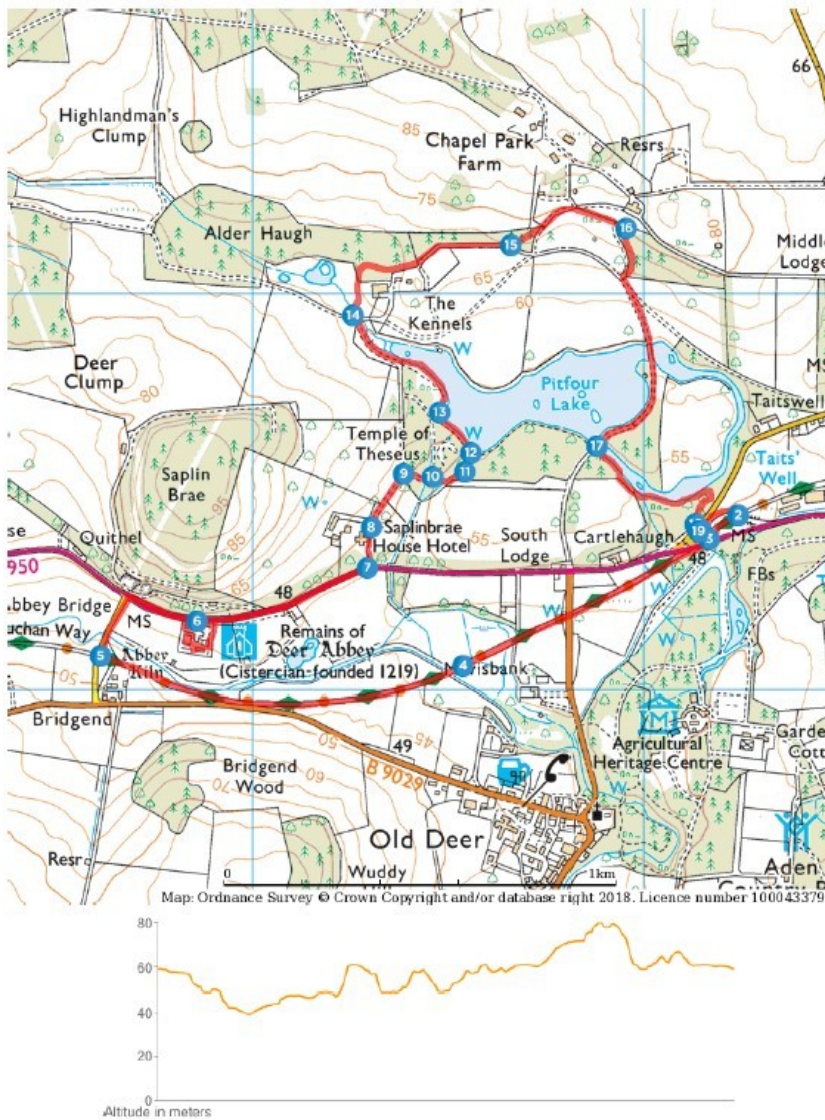
(57.52617; -2.03092) <https://w3w.co/rent.irony.rules>

After crossing the road, you are now back at the walk start-point. (6.1 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](#)