

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Forest of Deer-Loudon Stone Circle Loop (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This is easy walking on a gently undulating rural route passing through field and forest. There is historical interest along the way from Neolithic and Pictish times, and an insight into the foibles and indulgences of the landed nobility in Victorian times.

Duration: 2.75 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: The nearest public transport is the Stagecoach bus services passing through Mintlaw to/from Fraserburgh, e.g. #67 and #68. Check timetable. It would be a 2.65 km walk from your drop-off point on the A952 to the start of the walk. There is a small parking area on the opposite side of the road from the churchyard at the start of the walk.

Length: 9.150 km / 5.72 mi

Height Gain: 143 meter

Height Loss: 143 meter

Max Height: 120 meter

Min Height: 70 meter

Surface: Moderate. Mostly good forest roads and minor public roads.

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

Difficulty: Medium.

Dog Friendly: Yes, but keep dogs on lead near to livestock, and on public roads.

Refreshments: The Fishie Pub in Fetterangus. Options in Mintlaw.



Description

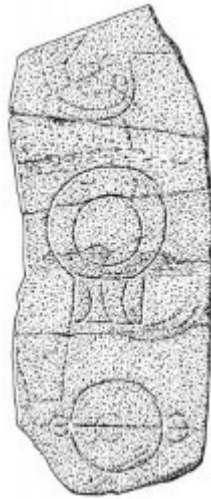
This walk offers some interesting contrasts. There are sections surrounded by thick swathes of conifer plantation, whilst in other sections there are open rural views over rolling countryside, interspersed with dry-stone walls and beech hedges. A sense of history accompanies you on this walk at the Forest of Deer in deepest Buchan – starting with a Pictish symbol stone in Fishie's Old Kirkyard at the start-point, then a Victorian observatory built so that the Laird of Pitfour could watch his racehorses train and run, and a difficult to find, hidden stone circle to capture the imagination (can you picture our ancient ancestors dragging those huge stones to the chosen spot?). After checking out the very weathered and damaged Pictish stone, the next point of interest is the Drinnie's Wood Observatory. In summer months, the observatory is open and you may climb to the top to take in the views. This octagonal observatory, built in 1845 by Admiral George Ferguson, fifth laird of Pitfour, gave him an uninterrupted view of his estate and to view his racehorses. We hope, using our instructions, that you will find the elusive Loudon Stone Circle.

As there is no signage close-by there are reports that many walkers give up on finding the grassy clearing in deep forest occupied by the very imposing stone circle. It has been noted that it is a classic Buchan variant of the recumbent stone circle configuration, on a low bank, on to which the huge standing stones had been dragged and levered into position. Although only the lichen-encrusted recumbent, west flanker and two other stones remain standing, this green, mossy, circle is a special place that may cause the hairs on the back of your neck to stand on end, in a good way!



Waypoints

(1) Start at Pictish Stone in Fetterangus Old Kirkyard



(57.54516; -2.03302)

The walk start from the Fetterangus Old Kirkyard on a minor road on the western fringe of Fetterangus (also know as Fishie). First, enter the churchyard and look to your right. Here you will see a Pictish symbol stone fixed to the wall. The inscription is almost completely weathered or damaged (see image showing what it once looked like). Now, return to the roadside and go left along the verge towards the nearby cross-roads.



(2) Go right up narrow access road marked Den Howie

(57.54398; -2.03223)

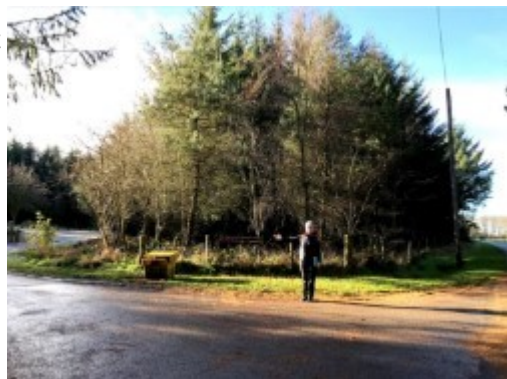
In less than 150 m, at the x-roads, walk up the narrow access road between beech hedges, marked for Den Howie. Keep walking up this road for about 850 m, passing the Den Howie cottage. (143 m)



(3) Left through car-park onto forest road

(57.54505; -2.04536)

In 850 m, go left into the car-park for Drinnie's Wood. Check out the information board then pass the steel gate to carry on along the forest road in an easterly direction. (996 m)



(4) Right to visit Observatory

(57.53944; -2.04508)



In 600 m, turn right up an access path for the Drinnie's Wood observatory*. In summer months, the observatory is open and you may climb to the top to take in the views. When you are ready, re-trace your steps back to the forest road and turn right to continue along the track. (1.6 km)

**Note: Octagonal observatory, built in 1845 by Admiral George*

Ferguson, fifth laird of Pitfour. The tower is said to have been built to allow Admiral Ferguson an uninterrupted view of his estate and/or to view his horses training for races.

See: <https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/smrpub/master/detail.aspx?tab=main&refno=NJ94NE0050>



(5) Right at t-junction

(57.53660; -2.04655)

In 600 m, upon arriving at a t-junction, go right and carry on, ignoring tracks leading off right and left soon after the t-junction. (2.2 km)



(6) Carry straight on - gently uphill

(57.53747; -2.05553)

In 600 m, where the road bends sharply left, instead carry straight on, following the rough road as it goes gently uphill towards trees, with a large field on the left side, initially. In about 600 m you are looking for a very indistinct path going right, into the trees. (2.8 km)



(7) Right for narrow path to Loudon Stone Circle

(57.53670; -2.06536)

In 600 m, as you arrive at a section of road where the trees on the left side are more open, you are looking for an indistinct path on your right going into the trees. Confusingly, the first path you identify is NOT the correct one. A few meters on you will find two indistinct paths going off towards the trees on your right. Within a few strides, these little paths join at the entrance to the thickly packed trees. Follow the narrow path into the trees, under heavy cover and in deep shade. In about 90 m you are looking for a chink of light on your left side indicating you are not far from the Loudon Stone Circle. (3.4 km)



(8) Left through trees to clearing with Stone Circle

(57.53747; -2.06568)



In about 90 m, you are looking for a chink of light on your left side indicating you are not far from the Loudon Stone Circle*. Go left here on a very indistinct path for about 40 m and soon you are in a grassy clearing occupied by the very imposing stone circle. When you are ready to move on, re-trace your steps through the trees back to the forest road where you turn right and carry on taking the forest road. (3.5 km)



**Note: 'This is a classic Buchan variant of the recumbent stone circle, having a bank, 0.8m high, on to which the standing stones had been dragged and levered into position. This is circular in plan, being 17.6m in diameter. Although only the lichen-encrusted recumbent, west flanker and two other stones remain standing, this green, mossy, circle is still an unearthly spot. The 12-ton recumbent would have required at least 40 adults to pull it up the slope ...'*

From: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/20538/loudon-wood>

(9) Carry straight on here

(57.53683; -2.06815)

In about 200 m from emerging back onto the forest road, carry straight on at a junction, ignoring the road going off to your left. (400 m)



(10) Right along minor road at Auchmachar Lodge

(57.54260; -2.07455)

In 900 m, you will emerge from woods onto a tarred minor road at Auchmachar Lodge. Go right here, walking along the verge of this quiet road. Take care to walk facing oncoming traffic, on the right side of the road. (4.8 km)



(11) Right into woods at White Cow Wood car-park

(57.55176; -2.07303)

In 1.1 km, where there is a car-park for White Cow Woods on your left, turn right to follow a forest road into the trees again. This route is marked for Loudon Stone Circle (although how anyone would find the stone circle from here is questionable!). (5.9 km)



(12) Right at t-junction

(57.55298; -2.06439)

In 600 m, you arrive at a t-junction. Turn right to follow this forest road*, with views of fields opening up on your right. (6.5 km)

**Note: this road is the track of the former racecourse set up here by Admiral Ferguson in the mid 19th Century (see Waypoint 4, Drinnie's Observatory)*



(13) Right on road through fields

(57.54988; -2.05559)

In 600 m, you leave the former racecourse track, turning right, away from the trees, towards open fields and farm buildings. (7.1 km)



(14) Left at y-junction

(57.544443; -2.05121)

In 700 m, beside some houses, go left along the tarred road, ignoring the track going straight ahead. You will follow this road as it passes Waypoint 3 on your outward journey, then re-tracing your steps back to the old churchyard where you started the walk. (7.8 km)



(15) Finish back at Fetterangus Old Kirkyard

(57.54518; -2.03312)

In 1.4 km you will have arrived back at your walk start-point by the old churchyard. (9.2 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](#)