

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Keig-Cothiemuir Stone Circle-River Don Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

A mostly gentle stroll in a varied rural landscape, with interesting historical and architectural highlights. The narrow path through trees, above the River Don, near the end of the route, requires moderate agility to navigate various ups and downs.

Duration: 1.5 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: The Inch-Alford Stagecoach 422 bus stops in Keig. Check timetables. Small parking area at walk start-point, or on-street parking in Keig.

Length: 4.18 km / 2.6 mi

Height Gain: 67 meter. **Height Loss:** 67 meter.

Max Height: 179 meter. **Min Height:** 135 meter.

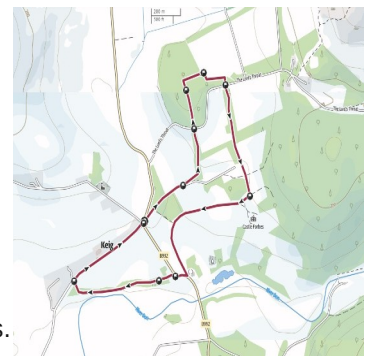
Surface: Moderate. Mostly on rough estate roads and narrow paths. Not suitable for off-road mobility scooters due to steep and narrow paths at various points. The narrow path through trees, above the River Don, near the end of the route, requires moderate agility to navigate various ups and downs.

Difficulty: Easy.

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

Dog Friendly: Yes, keep dogs on lead in the Castle Forbes estate, on public roads, and near to any farm animals.

Refreshments: Options in Alford.



Description

This is a very short but pleasant walk which takes in an ancient stone circle and good views of Castle Forbes, an early 19th C mansion house in a muted Scottish baronial castle style. Most of the walking is in open woodland, between pasture fields, and landscaped parkland, and there are many opportunities to enjoy views of the local countryside and surrounding hills, with long-distance views to the higher hills of Donside and Deeside from the aspect close to Castle Forbes. However, the highlight of the route is undoubtedly the Cothiemuir Hill Stone Circle, also known as the Devil's Hoofmark (due to cup marks on the recumbent). Thanks to recent forestry works, the circle is now in open ground. Although stones are missing around the circle, the recumbent stone and flankers are particularly impressive. The recumbent is thought to weigh over 20 tons and the flankers are around 9 ft tall. The circle is believed to have been built over 4,000 years ago on the site of an earlier burial cairn with a central chamber (the covering stone still lies in the centre of the circle). For more information, see: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/18055/cothiemuir-wood>. In this section there are good views of Turf Hill on Bennachie, and the Hill of Airlie to the immediate north-west. Here, a patchwork of fields lead up to a wooded hilltop. Hidden in the trees are the remains of an Iron Age hill-fort, with double defensive rings, known as the Barmkyn of North Keig. The hill has very uniform slopes on all sides, allowing our ancestors who lived there, or who sought refuge there, to readily see any potentially hostile approaches. The Forbes estate has been home to the Forbes family for over 600 years. The present building overlooking the River Don was built in 1815 by the 17th Lord Forbes, to designs by the architect Archibald Simpson. At the time of writing, it is occupied by the 23rd Lord Forbes, and is open to residential guests on fishing breaks. For more information about Castle Forbes, see: <http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/GDL00090>



Waypoints

(1) Start the walk at Forbes Castle access road entrance

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From the entrance to Castle Forbes estate at the outskirts of Keig, on the B992 road to Auchleven, enter the access road, walking away from Keig through trees in an easterly direction. Follow the access road for almost 100 m, then carry straight on to join another (rougher) estate road, leaving the access road (which bends away to your right). Soon, you cross a bridge over the Burn of Keig, and the estate road starts gently ascending.



(2) Go left off rough road onto path

In 330 m, as you reach an enclosed field on your right side, veer left off the rough estate road to join a narrow path through a belt of mature broadleaf trees. Follow the path through the trees, with fields now to your right and left. (330 m)



(3) Cross minor road and continue on path

In 370 m, cross a minor road (the My Lord's Throat road) and continue straight on, taking a narrow path that gently ascends through mature trees, eventually reaching an open area where trees have been felled. Keep going until you reach the obvious stone circle. (700 m)



(4) Cothiemuir Stone Circle

In 210 m, you will have arrived at the impressive Cothiemuir Stone Circle*. Once you have taken in the scene, carry on taking the path as before as it soon bends right, heading towards the parking area for the Cothiemuir Hill natural burial ground. (910 m)

** Note: The Cothiemuir Hill Stone Circle is also known as the Devil's Hoofmark. Although stones are missing around the circle, the recumbent stone and flankers are particularly impressive. The recumbent is thought to weigh over 20 tons and the flankers are around 9 ft tall. The circle is believed to have been built over 4,000 years ago on the site of an earlier burial cairn with a central chamber (the covering stone still lies in the centre of the circle). For more information, see:*

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/18055/cothiemuir-wood>



(5) Turn right onto access road at car-park area

In 200 m from the stone circle, the path emerges at the car-parking area for the Cothiemuir Hill natural burial ground*. Turn right here, passing an information board, walk through the car-park and then down the access drive towards the minor My Lord's Throat public road. (1.11 km)

** Note: You may wish to visit the burial ground. More information here:*

<https://www.leedam.com/locations/cothiemuirhill/>



(6) Cross minor road and straight on

In 200 m, cross the minor My Lord's Throat road and go straight ahead to follow a Castle Forbes estate access road, passing a house on your right in about 270 m, and the estate offices on your right in about 470 m. (1.31 km)



(7) Take road turning right away from castle

In 620 m, soon after passing a tennis court on your right side, follow the road bending right, away from the castle (which you can now see ahead of you, through trees). Soon, you will pass an attractive pond on your right side as you emerge from trees into open countryside with fields on both sides. At various points, looking back, you will have good views of Castle Forbes. After crossing a stone bridge over the Burn of Keig, follow the access road as it bends left and continues over an open parkland area towards the entrance gateway at the B992 main road. Turn right here to walk along the verge (take care) for about 65 m, before a bend. (1.93 km)

** Note: Thanks to Wikipedia for the following: "Castle Forbes is a 19th C country house in the Scottish baronial architecture style ... The ... estate has been home to the Forbes [family] for over 600 years ... The present building overlooking the River Don was built in 1815 by the 17th Lord Forbes, to designs by the architect Archibald Simpson ... Today it is occupied by [the] 23rd Lord Forbes and is open to residential guests ..."*



(8) Cross main road and go around gate

In 940 m, cross the main road (take extreme care, due to the blind bend), heading towards a gate into a yard for an estate/commercial building (Oakbank Sawmill - we have not encountered any activity here in the many times we have walked this route). Go around the gate on the left side and walk through the yard area, soon passing an open woodshed on your right side. (2.88 km)



(9) Veer right off farm road onto path through trees

In 120 m from crossing the road, leave the field access road to join a narrow path on your right side. Follow this rough and undulating path through the belt of trees, with glimpses of Keig, across a field on your right, and the River Don, on your left side. In about 500 m, before the belt of trees ends, follow the path as it turns right and soon emerges onto the road in Keig. (2.99 km)



(10) Cross main road in Keig and go right along pavement

In 620 m, cross the main road in Keig and go right along the pavement, with the houses on your left side. Continue on through Keig until you cross the road to return to your start-point at the entrance to Castle Forbes estate. (3.61 km)



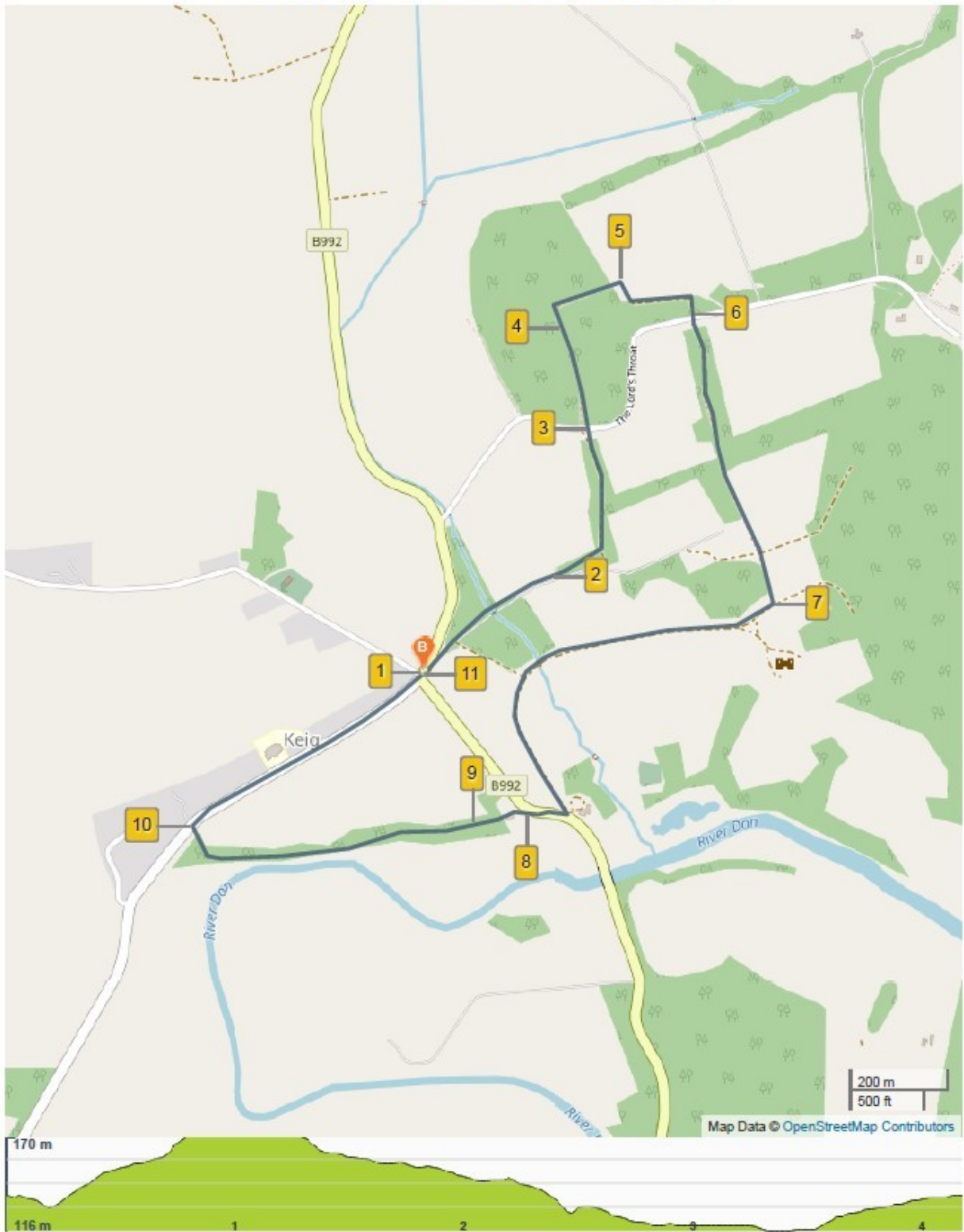
(11) Finish walk back at Forbes Castle access road entrance

In 570 m, you will have returned to your start-point at the entrance to Castle Forbes estate. (4.18 km)

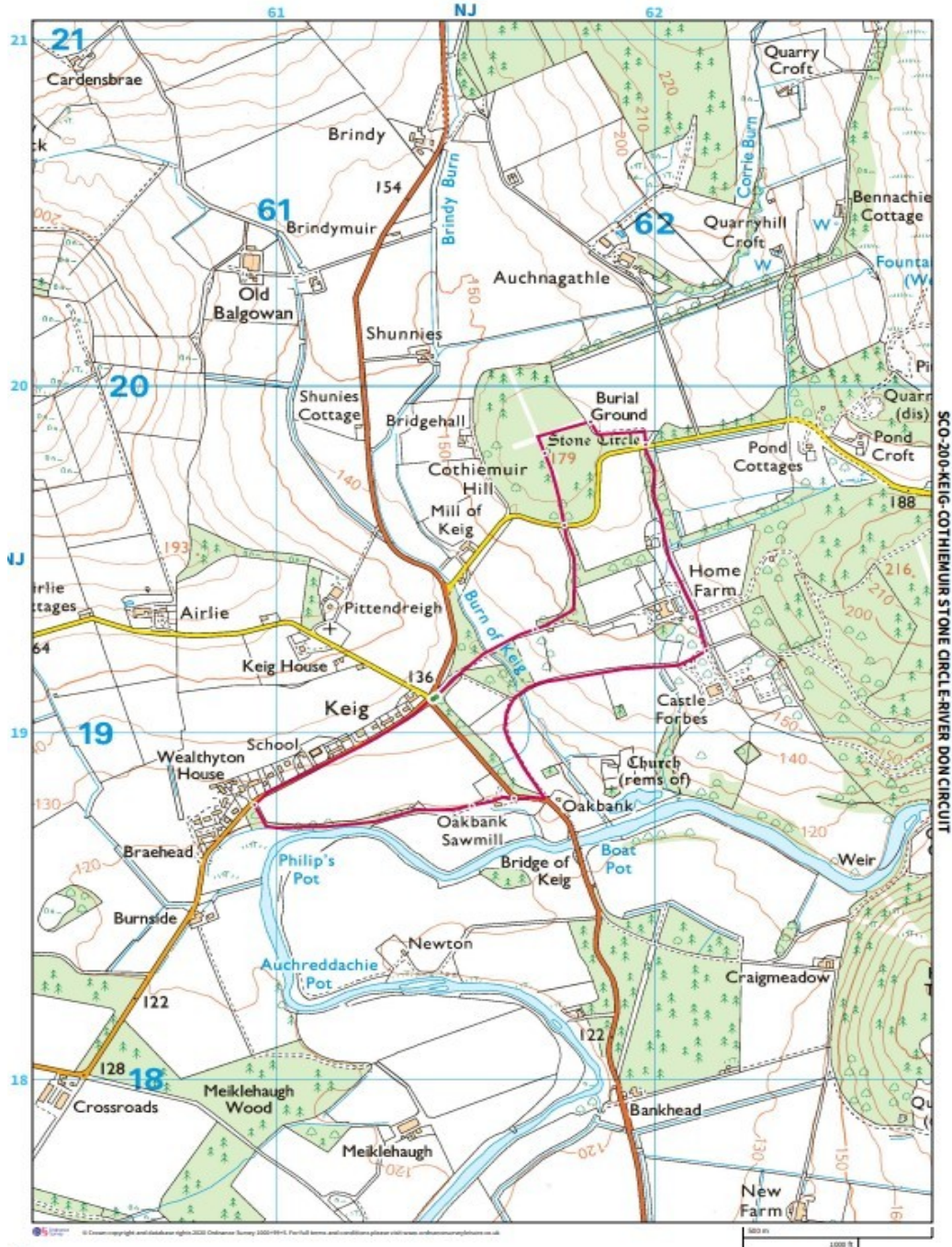


Route Map (with waypoints)

200-Keig-Cothiemuir Stone Circle-River Don Circuit



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 Alltrials](#)

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