

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Kincardine O'Neil-Dess Waterfall Circular (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This is an undemanding walk that rewards with a visit to the beautiful waterfall in a wooded glade on the Water of Dess. The walk environment, from an historic Deeside village, mixes open farmland with mature pine forest. There are good views over Strathdee towards Banchory.

Duration: 2.5 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Typically, Stagecoach #201 to Banchory from Aberdeen, then #202 to Kincardine o'Neil. Check timetables. Easy parking on the main (N Deeside Road) street in Kincardine o'Neil.

Length: 7.180 km / 4.49 mi

Height Gain: 185 meter

Height Loss: 185 meter

Max Height: 100 meter

Min Height: 209 meter

Surface: Moderate. Mostly well maintained paths or forestry roads. The path to the waterfall may be slippery in wet conditions.

Child Friendly: Yes, but only 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: The Village Store in Kincardine o'Neil does excellent hot drinks, hot snacks, and sandwiches.



Description

This is a delightful walk in the valley of the River Dee. The varied route passes through farmland and mature pine forest, with the beautiful Dess Waterfall as a striking focus at the mid-way point. From the old farm-town of Townhead there are marvellous views of Strathdee, towards Banchory. The walk starts and finishes at the historic ruin of the Church of St Mary in Kincardine O'Neil, the oldest village on Deeside. The present structure dates back to the 14th C but it is believed to have been a place of Christian worship from the 6th C. The village was, for centuries, an important river crossing place, on the ancient route over the Cairn O'Mount. King David 1st of Scotland forded the Dee here with his army in 1150, and in 1296, the 35,000 strong army of Edward 1st of England crossed here, and camped nearby, consuming all the village stores of food for the year ahead. Later, the ford was the direct drove route for cattle moving from northern Aberdeenshire to the markets at Crieff and Falkirk. From the 15th C to the 19th C Kincardine O'Neil held three fairs each year, culminating with the (St Bartholomew's Day) Bartle Fair, at which many thousands of cattle were bought and sold. Apparently, the fair would attract peddlers from far and wide, who set up stalls in the streets and the Kirk yard. The fairs were accompanied by merry-making, often descending into drunken brawls, with the residents climbing onto their roofs to get a better view of the street fighting. In 1777, an effort to suppress the "*cursing, lying, tricking, stealing, brawling, fighting and every indecency*" was resisted by local residents who did well selling food and drink to the boisterous crowds. The village is a quiet place, by comparison, today!



Useful links: <http://www.kincardineoneil.co.uk/> and <http://www.deesideway.org>

Waypoints

(1) Start walk at the ruined Auld Kirk

(57.08608; -2.67470) <https://w3w.co/situates.culling.teardrop>

After checking out the information board at the roofless Auld Kirk in Kincardine O'Neill, head west along the pavement on the North Deeside Road, through the village, looking out for a road going off on the right in about 250 m.



(2) Right up Pitmurchie Road

(57.08654; -2.67884) <https://w3w.co/whiplash.squeaks.coast>

In just over 250 m, turn right up Pitmurchie Road, past the old Episcopal Church on your right. (262 m)



(3) Veer left onto Deeside Way path

(57.08851; -2.68131) <https://w3w.co/unsightly.swam.treaties>

In another 280 m, veer left onto the signed Deeside Way path. (537 m)



(4) Follow Deeside Way path as it turns left

(57.09270; -2.69475) <https://w3w.co/breathing.putty.jabs>

After following the Deeside Way path for 1 km, the path takes a turn left, where a narrower path goes ahead through the trees. Keep following the Deeside Way. (1.5 km)



(5) Carry on taking main track at open area

(57.09237; -2.70922) <https://w3w.co/hawks.herbs.anyone>
In 900 m, as you reach a large cleared area in the trees, where tracks go off right and left, keep following the Deeside Way as it exits the clearing by veering slightly right and downhill past a house on the left. (2.4 km)



(6) Veer right and uphill at bridge

(57.09085; -2.71525) <https://w3w.co/folders.arise.nightfall>
In 700 m, the path descends to the Dess Burn where the Deeside Way continues, left, over a wooden bridge. Instead, take the narrow path that goes ahead and gently uphill through the trees. As you ascend on the path you will encounter a very muddy section. In order to avoid the deepest mud, try walking around the area by climbing a little above the path for a short time, although this is also muddy in places. (3.1 km)



(7) Dess Waterfall

(57.09205; -2.71694) <https://w3w.co/banana.pixel.jumbled>
In 100 m, or so, the path passes high above the Dess Burn where there is an impressive waterfall in a beautiful wooded setting. Carry on taking the path as it passes the Dess Waterfall on your left. Keep going on the path after the waterfall with the burn close on your left side, initially. (3.2 km)



(8) Right and uphill near Activity Centre

(57.09910; -2.71479) <https://w3w.co/sweated.originate.mailbox>
In 1 km from the Dess Waterfall, at a t-junction with a signpost for the nearby Deeside Activity Centre, go right and uphill on the forestry road. (4.2 km)



(9) Take left fork at y-junction

(57.09907; -2.71205) <https://w3w.co/imparting.arming.vows>

In 100 m, or so, at a y-junction on the forest roads, take the left fork. Soon, you arrive at a t-junction, where you turn right onto another forestry road. After about 100 m on this road, at a x-roads junction, where the main forestry road you are on bends sharp left, carry straight on gently uphill, now walking on a grassy track. For the avoidance of doubt, do not go left or right at this x-roads. As you gently ascend, continue past a cleared area of forest on your left side. (4.3 km)



(10) Right and downhill at Townhead x-roads

(57.09589; -2.70165) <https://w3w.co/octagonal.flickers.crawling>

In 900 m, upon meeting an access road to a house/houses at Townhead, go right and downhill. (5.2 km)



(11) Carry on downhill towards houses

(57.09456; -2.69906) <https://w3w.co/ticked.headboard.farmed>

In less than 200 m, as the road swings right, carry straight on downhill past a converted steading on your right, with trees on your left. (5.4 km)



(12) Veer right to pass house on right side

(57.09394; -2.69736) <https://w3w.co/suitably.dock.cautious>

In 100 m, go through the opening between stone pillars towards a detached house. Veer right to pass the house on the right side, with the house to your left. Follow the path* through a belt of trees downhill from the house. In about 200 m you will meet the Deeside Way path at Waypoint 4 on your outward journey. Turn left here to re-trace your steps back to Kincardine o'Neil. (5.5 km)

**Note: we have had a report that this path may be heavily overgrown in summer. If so, you have the option of returning to Waypoint 11 and following the tarred access road downhill to meet the Deeside Way path at an earlier point.*



(13) Finish walk back at the Auld Kirk

(57.08615; -2.67455) <https://w3w.co/situates.culling.teardrop>
In 1.7 km you will have returned to your start point at the Auld Kirk in Kincardine o'Neill. (7.2 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](#)