

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Kincardine O'Neil-Hill of Dess Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

Walking from an historic Deeside village, the route is mainly through mixed open farmland. From the higher points on the route there are fine views down to the Dee Valley, and of some prominent hilltops, principally Clachnaben, Mt. Battock, Mt. Keen, and Mortlich.

Duration: 2 hours.



Route Overview

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

Length: 6.020 km / 3.76 mi

Height Gain: 120 meter. **Height Loss:** 120 meter.

Max Height: 204 meter. **Min Height:** 94 meter.

Surface: Moderate. A mix of tarred minor road and good grassy tracks. We believe the walk is suitable for off-road mobility scooters.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

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. Otherwise, options in Aboyne and Banchory.



Description

This is a pleasant and undemanding walk in a mixed rural environment on Deeside, with a final section along the River Dee itself. There are splendid views throughout. 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 14thC but it is believed to have been a place of Christian worship from the 6thC. The route soon heads gently uphill on a section of the Old Military Road that ran from Fochabers to Fettercairn, completed under the direction of General Wade's deputy, Major William Caulfeild, in 1761. From the highest point, on the Dess Ridge, the route gradually descends to the Dee riverbank and then back to the village. Kincardine O'Neil 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 15thC to the 19thC 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 old Kincardine O'Neil church

(57.08613; -2.67485) <https://w3w.co/skimmers.blinking.deciding>
After checking out the information board at the roofless Auld Kirk in Kincardine O'Neil, 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

(57.08662; -2.67877) <https://w3w.co/cascaded.rollover.suspend>
In just over 250 m, turn right up Pitmurchie Road, past the old Episcopal Church on your right. You are now walking on an old military road*. Keep going for 1.25 km, ignoring the turn-off, left, for the Deeside Way in just under 300 m. (257 m)

**Note: This is the Old Military Road that ran from Fochabers to Fettercairn, completed under the direction of General Wade's deputy, Major William Caulfeild, in 1761. This section is initially a tarred minor modern road, but later becomes a rough farm track as it heads over the Hill of Dess towards Lumphanan.*



(3) Straight on uphill - at the sign for Hill of Dess House

(57.09652; -2.68762) <https://w3w.co/mammals.airbase.plod>
In 1.25 km, where the minor road turns sharp right, carry straight on uphill past the sign for Hill of Dess House. (1.5 km)



(4) Straight on uphill - at sign for Lumphanan

(57.09765; -2.68832) <https://w3w.co/texts.responds.landed>
In about 100 m, at a waymarking sign, keep going straight uphill again to join a rough access road, leaving the tarred road that swings right to Hill of Dess Farm. (1.6 km)



(5) Veer slightly left - keeping on the old road

(57.10071; -2.69148) <https://w3w.co/linguists.skippers.bootleg>
In 400 m, after passing Hill of Dess House and outbuildings on your left, veer slightly left to carry on following the rough old road (ignoring an opening on your right). (2.0 km)



(6) Take the path on the left fork at y-junction

(57.10105; -2.69265) <https://w3w.co/vegans.scale.clicker>
In 80 m, or so, at a y-junction, take the left fork, a slightly overgrown path. (2.1 km)



(7) Left through gate into field

(57.10212; -2.69558) <https://w3w.co/factually.lower.towel>
In 200 m, go left through the steel gate (there is an opening lever for walkers) into the field, being careful to close the gate behind you. Take the narrow path for 30 m, or so, through long grass to walk around the field edge, in shorter grass, in a clockwise direction, or cross the field diagonally in a SW direction, eventually facing W. (2.3 km)



(8) Left upon exiting field - between drystone walls

(57.10069; -2.69797) <https://w3w.co/sheds.become.waged>
In 300 m, or so, after walking around the field, go left through the gap in the stone walls and turn left to walk in a southerly direction along the track, with stone walls on either side. Keep going on this track. It soon veers very slightly right and the stone walls on either side are closer as you walk gently downhill in the direction of Townhead. (2.6 km)



(9) Through gate to pass below Townhead farm-house

(57.09739; -2.69888) <https://w3w.co/jars.gullible.windmills>

After 400 m you will arrive at another steel gate with an opening lever. Go through the gate, being careful to close the gate behind you as you follow the grassy track into an area of open trees just below the old Townhead farm-house. (3.0 km)



(10) Left down tarred access road

(57.09559; -2.70107) <https://w3w.co/tunnel.foster.explained>

In 200 m, descend from the path onto a tarred access road. Go left and downhill on this road, carrying straight on downhill instead of going right when the road swings sharp right before a large converted steading. Pass the converted steading on your right as you walk downhill towards a house. (3.2 km)



(11) Pass by right-hand gable of house onto path

(57.09393; -2.69737) <https://w3w.co/suitably.dock.cautious>

In 300 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. Turn left here to walk back on the Deeside Way in the direction of Kincardine O'Neil. (3.5 km)



(12) Right off Deeside Way into path through trees

(57.09141; -2.69010) <https://w3w.co/hedgehog.firm.incurs>

In 600 m, opposite a metal field gate, leave the Deeside Way path to follow a path on your right, going in a southerly direction into a belt of trees. Follow this path until it reaches the back of some houses where you turn sharp right to follow another grassy path (actually, a section of the Old Deeside Road) to the verge of the main A93 road. Turn left at the road to walk in the direction of Kincardine O'Neil along the verge of the road past the houses. (4.1 km)



(13) Veer right off A93 down grassy road to River Dee

(57.08780; -2.68855) <https://w3w.co/accompany.partner.twisty>

In 400 m from Waypoint 12, after passing a small group of houses on your left, very carefully cross the busy A93 road to go through a metal gate and follow a grassy road downhill towards the River Dee. As the road descends towards a modern fisher's bothy you may wish to take a path closer to the river rather than continue following the grassy access road. Pass the fisher's bothy and continue on the rough road, parallel with the river. The cottage on the other side of the river indicates the point where an oared ferry-boat operated in times past. (4.5 km)



(14) Off rough access road to carry on down riverbank

(57.08347; -2.68201) <https://w3w.co/sage.clapper.energy>

In 800 m, leave the rough access road by veering slightly right and continue walking along the riverbank path in an easterly direction. Fairly soon, the path comes to an end at a rough access road, where you turn sharp left away from the river to walk along the rough access road towards the centre of Kincardine O'Neil. This rough road is a section of old drove road, and cattle were once driven across a ford in the river near to the point where you turn up towards the village. (5.3 km)



(15) Finish walk back at the old church in Kincardine O'Neil

(57.08615; -2.67493) <https://w3w.co/skimbers.blinking.deciding>

In 700 m from Waypoint 14, you will have returned to the Auld Kirk, where you started the walk. (6.0 km)



Route Map



Links:

[Photos from walk](#)

[Download Route Guide](#) (PDF with illustrated Waypoints)

[Download GPX file](#) (GPS Exchange Format)

[Access Walk on OutdoorAccess](#)

[Access Walk on OSMaps](#)

[Access Walk on Alltrails](#)

[Access Walk on Wikiloc](#)