

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Kincardine O'Neil-Old Roads Ramble (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This is a pleasant walk in a mixed rural landscape on Deeside. The ascent from the river to the old grazing pastures on the ridge of the Hill of Dess is gradual. There are good views throughout, and many historical associations.

Duration: 2.5 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Frequent Stagecoach bus service along Deeside. Check timetables. On-street, or small car-park near the village hall, off The Spalings road.

Length: 7.550 km / 4.72 mi.

Height Gain: 163 meter. **Height Loss:** 163 meter.

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

Surface: Moderate. On good paths and tracks. Good walking surfaces throughout, and some sections have walking posts to assist route-finding. We believe this route may be suitable for off-road mobility scooters. However, the path narrows between bushes for a short section after Waypoint 7, and the approach to the gate at Waypoint 14 goes through very rough tussocky grass.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

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

Refreshments: Freshly made sandwiches in village shop.



Description

This walk, in an elongated figure of eight, provides a range of country and riverside environments to enjoy in scenic Deeside. 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. This walking route takes in a number of old roads, starting with Gallowhill Road, its purpose deriving from Medieval times when every feudal baron was required to erect a gibbet (gallows) for the execution of male criminals, and sink a well or pit, for the drowning of females! Soon after, the route follows a short section of the Old Deeside Road, now a farm track, which dates to before the great agricultural improvements that started in the 1700's. It ran from the Hardgate in Aberdeen westwards. Returning to the village, the route down Dee Street to the river is part of an old cattle droving road, leading to a place where the river could be forded. This 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. Later, the ford was the direct drove route for cattle moving from Aberdeenshire to the markets at Crieff and Falkirk. In more modern times, a row-boat ferry operated (until 1937) a little way upstream. Leaving the riverside and ascending the slopes of the Hill of Dess, wide-ranging views open up as the route arrives at an extensive grassy area with a patchwork of rough fields surrounded by dry-stone walls. Here, the path follows another old road, a "green lane" between the stone dykes, probably associated with the droving route over the River Dee. The route then meets 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. This old track becomes a tarred minor road as it descends back to Kincardine O'Neil. See: <http://www.kincardineoneil.co.uk/>



Waypoints

(1) Start the walk at Kincardine O'Neil Church

(57.08611; -2.67487) <https://w3w.co/woof.prowl.mural>

After checking out the information board at the roofless Auld Kirk in Kincardine O'Neil, cross the A93 main road with care (very busy!), go very briefly left, then right to pass the old fountain* and down Gallowhill** Road which soon becomes an unsurfaced road, heading over the Neil Burn.

**Note: the fountain was fed by pipes from an ancient well, nearby, St Erchan's Well. The fountain is dated AD1835. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert are said to have stopped here to water their horses on their first visit to Deeside in 1847. See:*

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/35252/kincardine-oneil-st-erchards-well>



***Note: the name of the road derives from Medieval times when every feudal baron was required to erect a gibbet (gallows) for the execution of male criminals, and sink a well or pit, for the drowning of females! The gallows was usually sited on higher ground outside of a settlement.*

(2) Right along grassy road

(57.08787; -2.67365) <https://w3w.co/magic.decisions.capillary>

In about 220 m from the old church, after crossing a bridge over the Neil Burn, and with a couple of cottages on your left side, go right at a y-junction onto a grassy farm road going east. In fact, this is a section of the Old Deeside Road*. In 250 m the track meets a minor tarred road. Cross the tarred road and carry on taking the grassy track towards trees, ahead of you. There are fine views back down to the village of Kincardine O'Neil and west along the valley of the River Dee. (219 m)

**Note: The Old Deeside Road dates back before the great agricultural improvements that started in the 1700's. It ran from the Hardgate in Aberdeen out to the Deeside villages. The route was mostly on higher ground than the modern A93 North Deeside Road, to avoid the boggy 'unimproved' ground at lower levels.*



(3) Sharp right at bench to go down Castle access drive

(57.08841; -2.66582) <https://w3w.co/pricier.backpacks.strapped>

In 500 m from Waypoint 2, the rough road enters trees and passes a bench on your right side. Go right here to join the access road for Kincardine Castle*. Turn right at the access road and go downhill, back towards the village. When the access road meets the A93 main road, go right and cross the road with care. Walk back towards the village centre, passing the old church where you started the walk. (697 m)

**Note: if you walk on a 100 m, or so, at this point, before returning to the village, you can catch a peek of Kincardine Castle, across the large park in front of it. The castle, is, in fact, a Victorian mansion house, and is '... now a venue for exclusive-use events – house parties, meetings, weddings and so on ..' See: <http://www.kincardinecastle.com/interactive-garden/the-castle/history-of-kincardine-castle/>*



(4) Left down Dee Street

(57.08625; -2.67523) <https://w3w.co/galloped.heightens.lighters>
In 900 m, just after passing the old Kincardine O'Neil church where you started the walk, go left down Dee Street*. Soon the tarred surface becomes a rough grassy farm road. At the River Dee, turn right and follow the path, with the river on your left side. Eventually you will join a rough access road for the fishers' bothy* ahead of you. (1.6 km)

**Note: Dee Street is, in fact, an old drovers' road, leading to a ford over the River Dee. Thanks to the Kincardine O'Neil village website for the following information: '... sited on the northern bank of the river Dee, Kincardine O'Neil was for centuries one of the most important river crossing places. There were over 30 recognised fords crossing the Dee but the one at Kincardine O'Neil was particularly significant being on the ancient route over the Cairn O'Mount. King David 1st of Scotland crossed the Dee with his army in 1150. Then in 1296, the 35,000 strong army of Edward 1st of England crossed the river here and camped near the village, consuming the villager's entire year's supplies of food and drink in a single day. In more peaceful times the ford was the most direct drove route for cattle moving from northern Aberdeenshire to the markets at Crieff and Falkirk. When the Dee was in spate the drovers would have to wait near the village with their cattle until water levels dropped. Other travellers were able to use a ferry which crossed the river a little upstream from the ford. The ferry was in use until 1937 when a flood washed it away and wrecked it, at this time the fare was 2d ...'. See: <https://kincardineoneil.co.uk/history.html>*



(5) Carry on past fishers' hut

(57.08361; -2.68558) <https://w3w.co/belonging.collected.reward>
In 800 m, carry on past the fishers' hut. Soon, the path joins a grassy access road. Carry on up the access road towards the A93 main road. There are very fine views of the River Dee to enjoy at various points. (2.4 km)



(6) Cross A93 and left past houses on right

(57.08789; -2.68849) <https://w3w.co/remission.technical.outfit>
In 600 m, cross the A93 with extreme care (it can be a very busy road with vehicles going at speed, here). Go left once across the road and walk along the grassy verge, passing some houses on your right side. (3.0 km)



(7) Right up grassy path - then sharp left

(57.08863; -2.68970) <https://w3w.co/simulates.influencing.rear>
In 100 m, or so, from crossing the road, and after passing the last house on your right, turn sharp right up a grassy path* at the rear of the little group of houses. In 40 m, turn sharp left to follow a path through an attractive belt of mature trees, with fields on either side. (3.1 km)

**Note: this grassy path is, in fact, another section of the Old Deeside Road, encountered between Waypoints 2 and 3, earlier in the walk.*



(8) Left along Deeside Way path

(57.09140; -2.69008) <https://w3w.co/hedgehog.firm.incurs>
In 300 m, you will emerge from the path through the belt of trees onto the Deeside Way* path. Turn left, and follow the path west, soon passing through a gate. (3.4 km)

**Note: The Deeside Way runs from Duthie Park in Aberdeen to Ballater. For much of its length it follows the old Deeside Railway line and the River Dee. The line by-passed Kincardine O'Neil, however, to go a little north, for Lumphanan and Torphins, before returning to the Dee near Dess, a little east of Aboyne. See: <http://www.deesideway.org/>*



(9) Veer right up grassy path

(57.09266; -2.69473) <https://w3w.co/breathing.putty.jabs>
After 300 m the Deeside Way path bends left and a more indistinct grassy path goes straight ahead into a belt of trees. Follow this path* uphill through the belt of trees, eventually passing a house on your right side. The path leads out of the grassy garden area at the side of the house onto a rough access road. Keep going uphill on the access road. (3.7 km)

**Note: we have had reports that this path can become very overgrown in summer and may not suit all walkers. As an alternative, you may carry on walking along the Deeside Way for about 190 m to where it crosses a tarred access road. Turn right there to walk up the tarred access road. In just over 300 m you will arrive at the next waypoint, Waypoint 10.*



(10) Carry straight on uphill

(57.09451; -2.69903) <https://w3w.co/backswing.broadens.cured>
In 400 m from leaving the Deeside Way you will have ascended to a junction on a tarred access road to Townhead. The road on the left drops downhill, back to the Deeside Way. Your route is straight ahead, gently uphill through trees. (4.1 km)



(11) Right up grassy path by shed

(57.09562; -2.70107) <https://w3w.co/tunnel.foster.explained>
In 100 m, or so, at a walks post, go right up a grassy path by a shed/garage with a red roof. The path ascends gently through open trees close to what was Townhead Farm* (now converted into houses). Keep following the path as it emerges into an extensive grassy area on Hill of Dess with many old dry-stone dykes**. Go through a green gate (close it carefully behind you) and carry on. There are fine open views to enjoy in this section. (4.2 km)

**Note: there are some ruined remains in the Townhead area that suggest it was a bigger 'ferm-toun' at the start of the great agricultural improvements in the 1700's.*



***Note: You are now walking on another old road. A 'green lane' that may have been associated with the droving route over the River Dee at Kincardine O'Neil. The Aberdeenshire Council Historic Record (thank you!) says this about this area: 'Field pattern comprising a complex of irregular-shaped fields with old road winding through them. The road is bordered by walls on either side containing remains of a few stone-walled buildings or possible huts. It may be remains of stock enclosures associated with old stock road above the ford over the River Dee. May be of late Medieval period.' See: <https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/smrpub/master/detail.aspx?tab=main&refno=NJ50SE0031>*

(12) Left along grassy track at y-junction

(57.09794; -2.69788) <https://w3w.co/fermented.emotional.messy>
In 400 m you arrive at a y-junction in the grassy lanes. Go left here, in a northerly direction. (4.6 km)



(13) Veer right at post to cross field

(57.10066; -2.69799) <https://w3w.co/fire.engulfing.defensive>
In 300 m, at a walks post, and just after passing the remains of a stone stock enclosure (?) on your left, veer right through a gap in the stone dykes into a field, going diagonally, in a NE direction, to cross the field. To assist you, the grass on the route may have been cut into a rough path. (4.9 km)



(14) Through gate and sharp right

(57.10213; -2.69558) <https://w3w.co/minerals.scores.sprayer>

In 200 m you will pass through a rusted green gate (close carefully behind you) onto a grassy path where there is a walk post. Go right here to follow the track back towards Kincardine O'Neil (ignore an option to go sharp left in 200 m, or so). As you start to descend, with the distinctive Hill of Dess house on your right side, you are now on an old military road. This rough road becomes a tarred public road after the access section to Hill of Dess House. Carry on downhill on the tarred road, enjoying the fine views to the south and west. (5.1 km)

**Note: Part 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. The Road incorporated many old roads from earlier times, linking Angus to Deeside, and Deeside to Moray.*



(15) Right along lane - off Pitmurchie Road

(57.09101; -2.68478) <https://w3w.co/suspend.corrects.sage>

In 1.5 km, descending on the Old Military Road, you will reach the outskirts of Kincardine O'Neil where the road is known as Pitmurchie Road. You may carry straight on here, but we suggest going right down a lane that leads you back to the Deeside Way where there are open views down towards the River Dee. At the end of the lane, turn left onto the Deeside Way path, with the back gardens of a row of houses on your left side. Soon, the path meets Pitmurchie Road which you re-join. From here walk downhill, past the attractive Episcopal Church to the main A93 Road. Turn left to walk along the main street back to your start-point at the old Kincardine O'Neil Church. (6.6 km)



(16) Finish walk back at Kincardine O'Neil church

(57.08609; -2.67491) <https://w3w.co/woof.prowl.mural>

In 1 km, you will have arrived back at your start-point at the old Kincardine O'Neil Church. (7.6 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](#)