

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Muir of Dinnet-Cnoc Dubh Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

A fine leg-stretching forest walk in the pine and birch woods above the National Nature Reserve Visitor Centre at the popular Muir of Dinnet location on Deeside. The ascent to the rocky summit of Cnoc Dubh is rewarded by good westerly views.

Duration: 2.5 hours



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: No public transport nearby. From Aberdeen, follow the A93 Aberdeen to Ballater road, which passes through Dinnet. The main car park is at the Burn O'Vat visitor centre, 6 kilometres from Dinnet. Head south-west on the A93 for 4 kilometres, then turn onto the B9119. There is a car-park at the walk start/end point. Arrive early if at all possible. **The car-park is typically very busy. If the car-park is full be sure to have a Plan B for your day and move on!**

Length: 6.560 km / 4.10 mi

Height Gain: 231 meter. **Height Loss:** 231 meter.

Max Height: 329 meter. **Min Height:** 173 meter.

Surface: Moderate. On good paths and forest roads. May be muddy in places.

Difficulty: Medium.

Child Friendly: Yes, if children are used to walks of this distance and overall ascent. Please take especial care in approaching Waypoint 13, a precipitous vantage point above the Burn O'Vat gorge. Keep children well clear of the edge.

Dog Friendly: Yes, on lead on public roads.

Refreshments: Options in Ballater, Aboyne and Tarland.



Description

This is a pleasant forest walk in mature pine and birch woodland with two sections of vigorous ascent on the outward leg. Watch out for the large ant-hills in this section! There are good views from the summit of Cnoc Dubh ("Black Hill" in Gaelic) to Pannanach Hill and Mount Keen in the south-west and, to the west, Craigendarroch (above Ballater) and Lochnagar. On the descent, the route fords the tumbling Vat Burn before making a diversion to a precipitous vantage point above the Burn O'Vat gorge. Close to the end of the walk, the route passes a viewpoint to Loch Kinord, with information boards. The route is within the Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve, part of the Cairngorms National Park. The Reserve extends 1166 hectares from the River Dee to Culbean Hill, and encompasses a wide range of habitats including dry heath, raised bog, woodland, and lochs. Before, or after, the walk, we suggest a visit to the interesting NNR Centre, and a short excursion to the huge Burn O'Vat stone pot, entered via a narrow gap in the rock formation with running water at your feet. The Vat, a geological oddity with an interesting local history, is a popular short walk signposted from the Visitor Centre.



For more information about the Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve see: <http://bit.ly/3a0B9ld>

Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Muir of Dinnet Visitor Centre

(57.08510; -2.94269) <https://w3w.co/forehand.exile.certainly>
Start the walk at the Muir of Dinnet NNR Visitor Centre car-park*. With the Centre on your right side, prepare to cross the B9119 road from the car-park entrance.

**Note: Directions by car: from Aberdeen, follow the A93 Aberdeen to Ballater road, which passes through Dinnet. The main car park is at the Burn O'Vat visitor centre, 6 kilometres from Dinnet. Head south-west on the A93 for 4 kilometres, then turn onto the B9119.*

***NNR Update September 2020

The car parks at Muir of Dinnet NNR are open but very busy and are full most days from 11am - 4pm. If you turn up and the car park is full please do not park on the road verges but look for somewhere else to visit. Lots of places are busy at the moment so worth having a plan B. ***

See also: <https://www.nature.scot/enjoying-outdoors/scotlands-national-nature-reserves/muir-dinnet-nnr/muir-dinnet-nnr-about-reserve>



(2) Cross road - pass barriers - then go right

(57.08483; -2.94286) <https://w3w.co/creatures.life.bounty>
In about 35 m from the centre of the car-park cross the B9119 road with care to pass through wooden barriers onto a surfaced path. Almost immediately turn right to follow the path for Parkin's Moss. (35 m)



(3) Right up rough access road

(57.08233; -2.93839) <https://w3w.co/layover.reclined.stop>
In 450 m, or so, turn away from the cottage you can see on your left side to go right up the rough access road in the direction of the B9119 road you crossed earlier. (501 m)



(4) Cross B9119 road - and go left a short distance

(57.08038; -2.93885) <https://w3w.co/cursing.ripen.piano>

In 225 m, the rough access road meets the B9119 road. Cross with care and turn left for a short distance looking for a path opening on your right. (725 m)



(5) Sharp right onto woodland path

(57.08017; -2.93890) <https://w3w.co/causes.jogged.majors>

In 25 m, or so, turn right off the B9119 road onto a path into the trees (former forest road). Follow this path uphill into the forest. (752 m)



(6) Follow forest road bending left

(57.07990; -2.94952) <https://w3w.co/lightens.debit.harsh>

After a 650 m ascent, follow the path/forest road as it bends left, ignoring the narrow path going directly uphill ahead of you*. Keep following the path/forest road for almost 2 km as it winds around the slopes of Cnoc Dubh hill, eventually ascending towards the top. Watch out for a number of prominent anthills close to the path as this section progresses. (1.4 km)

**Note: if you take the path going steeply uphill here you will reach the summit of Cnoc Dubh at Waypoint 8 very quickly. This shortens the walk by about 1.5 km.*



(7) Right for path to summit

(57.07963; -2.95866) <https://w3w.co/optimally.news.bottle>

After 1.9 km you will have ascended to a small plateau under the summit of Cnoc Dubh. Follow the (muddy!?) path to your right which makes its way to the top of the hill. (3.3 km)



(8) Summit of Cnoc Dubh

(57.07912; -2.95719) <https://w3w.co/mouse.scream.sprinkler>
In 150 m, or so, you will have arrived at the summit area of Cnoc Dubh where there are smooth rocky sections. The view E down to Loch Kinord is mostly obscured by trees but you have good views towards Pannanach Hill and Mount Keen in the SW, and Lochnagar in the W. When you are ready, re-trace your steps back to Waypoint 7. (3.5 km)



(9) Re-trace steps to Waypoint 7 - and take path veering right

(57.07965; -2.95858) <https://w3w.co/optimally.news.bottle>
In 150 m, or so, having re-traced your steps to Waypoint 7, take the path veering right. The path soon starts to descend more steeply in a NW direction. (3.6 km)



(10) Follow path onto forest road - then right to pass gate

(57.08295; -2.96870) <https://w3w.co/surprised.examples.vaccines>
In 800 m, the path meets a forest road before a gate. Go right here to pass by the gate and keep following the forest road, soon fording the Vat Burn (there are good stepping stones). (4.4 km)



(11) Right and downhill on path to Visitor Centre

(57.08502; -2.96535) <https://w3w.co/suspend.emulated.safely>
In 300 m, after fording the Vat burn go right and downhill on the signposted path to the Visitor Centre. (4.7 km)



(12) Divert right to above Burn O'Vat gorge

(57.08475; -2.95070) <https://w3w.co/rocked.tiredness.invents>
After 1.1 km, divert right on a path that will take you to a position above the Burn O'Vat gorge. (5.8 km)



(13) Burn O'Vat gorge from above

(57.08399; -2.95041) <https://w3w.co/websites.impresses.brief>
In 100 m, or so, you will be in a position above the Burn O'Vat gorge. Be careful and do not venture too close to the edge. When you are ready, re-trace your steps to the main Visitor Centre path and continue on that path, as before. (5.9 km)



(14) Loch Kinord viewpoint

(57.08499; -2.94475) <https://w3w.co/culminate.cools.wishes>
In 400 m, you will arrive at the Loch Kinord viewpoint shelter where there are information boards and a good view towards Loch Kinord. When you are ready, continue to descend on the path to the Visitor Centre. (6.3 km)



(15) Finish walk back at Muir of Dinnet Visitor Centre

(57.08510; -2.94281) <https://w3w.co/forehand.exile.certainly>
After a final 300 m you will arrive back at the NNR Visitor Centre* car-park where the walk ends. (6.6 km)

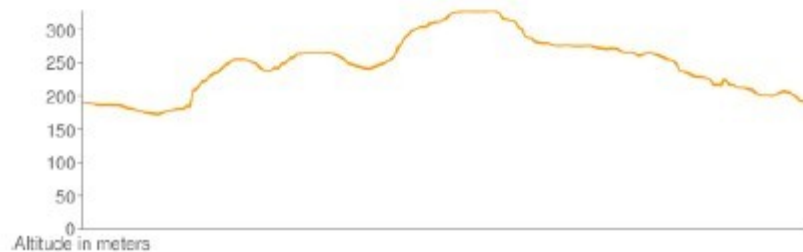
**Note: before, or after, the walk, we suggest: 1) a visit to the interesting NNR Centre; and, 2) a visit to the Burn O'Vat gorge short walk signposted from the Visitor Centre.*

See also: <https://www.nature.scot/enjoying-outdoors/scotlands-national-nature-reserves/muir-dinnet-nnr/muir-dinnet-nnr-about-reserve>



(a)

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](#)