

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Old Deer-Aikey Brae-Stuartfield Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

Some road walking doesn't detract from this attractive and varied circuit in central Buchan that links some recently made paths to visit the memorable Aikey Brae Stone Circle. The route is peppered with historical interest and open rural views.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Stagecoach #66 from Mintlaw. Check timetable. Parking on-street in Old Deer.

Length: 9.130 km / 5.71 mi

Height Gain: 149 meter. **Height Loss:** 149 meter.

Max Height: 123 meter. **Min Height:** 37 meter.

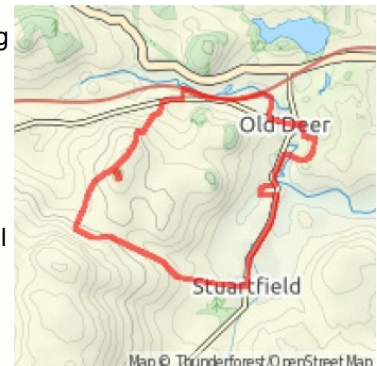
Surface: Smooth. A mix of fairly recently made paths and paved surfaces.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

Dog Friendly: Yes, on lead near farm animals and on public roads.

Refreshments: Options in Mintlaw.



Description

This is a varied walk amongst the undulating countryside that characterises the Buchan area. The circular route starts in Old Deer, an attractive little village that can trace its roots back to the Christian missionary St Drostan in the mid 6thC. Leaving the village, the route soon joins a section of the Formartine and Buchan Way, a linear pathway that uses the former railway line linking Dyce to the village of Maud where it splits into two - eastwards to Peterhead and northwards to Fraserburgh. From the path, we gain a sighting of the ruins of Deer Abbey, built in the 13thC, but abandoned after the Protestant Reformation in the 16thC. After a short section on the public road, our route ascends Aikey Brae, where there is a new path and helpful information boards. For a hundred years, from the mid 19thC to the mid 20thC, the Horse Fair at Aikey Brae was one of the most popular summer events in whole of NE Scotland, and attracted the travelling community from far and wide. Making our way over the hill, we soon arrive at the impressive "main event" on the walk, the Aikey Brae Recumbent Stone Circle, dating from the early Bronze Age, where there are fine open views. The whale-shaped recumbent stone is exceptionally large and there are five stones still standing. Next, a fairly long but enjoyable section on a quiet country lane between fields leads down to Stuartfield, an unpretentious but pleasant planned village, established in 1763, when it was known as New Crichton. Here, a new track avoids the busy road, and takes us to the wooded walks network in Aden Park, home of the Aberdeenshire Farming Museum, and close to our start point in Old Deer where we advise checking out the interesting remains of the original church located in the graveyard of the current Deer Parish Church. The old church was established in the 15thC, the site possibly having an association with Deer Abbey from the 13thC, and earlier Christian missionaries may have used this site from the 6thC.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk outside Deer Parish Church in the centre of Old Deer

(57.51930; -2.03729) <https://w3w.co/forces.examine.deodorant>

Start the walk outside Deer Parish Church in the centre of Old Deer*, on the B9030 road. With your back to the door of the church, cross the road and walk up the pavement on the right side of Abbey Street (B9029).

**Note: Old Deer is an attractive little village that can trace its roots back to the Christian missionary St Drostan in the mid 6th C. Thanks to Undiscovered Scotland for this information:*

<https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/deer/olddeer/index.html>



(2) Turn right for access path to the Formartine and Buchan Way

(57.52000; -2.04221) <https://w3w.co/global.icebergs.maybe>

In 300 m, turn right off the pavement and down the path signed for the Formartine and Buchan Way. (305 m)



(3) Left onto the Formartine and Buchan Way

(57.52256; -2.04323) <https://w3w.co/pebble.spells.skate>

In just under 350 m, ascend the low embankment onto the Formartine and Buchan Way* and go left, in a broadly westerly direction, away from Old Deer. In about 650 m, look out for the ruins of Deer Abbey** on your right, over the South Ugie Water. (641 m)

**Note: The pathway uses the former railway line linking from Dyce, on the edge of Aberdeen in the south, to the village of Maud where it splits into two routes; eastwards to Peterhead and northwards to Fraserburgh.*

***Note: After the walk we can recommend a visit to the fascinating and well signed ruins of Deer Abbey*, built in the 13th Century, but abandoned after the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century. The Book of Deer, with the first written examples of the Gaelic language, is believed to have been created at an earlier monastery in Old Deer, established by St Drostan, in the 10th Century, and kept in Deer Abbey library whilst the abbey was in operation (it is now held at Cambridge University). There is free access to the Abbey and opening times, and more information, are to be found here:*

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/deer-abbey/history/>



(4) Left off the Formartine and Buchan Way

(57.52295; -2.05823) <https://w3w.co/inspector.thumbnail.fork>
After 1km, where the Formartine and Buchan Way crosses a minor road that connects the A950 (on your right) and the B9029 (on your left), turn left off the path and walk up the verge of the minor road to its junction with the B9029. At the t-junction, turn right (in the direction of Maud) and walk along the verge (take care - the road can be busy). (1.6 km)



(5) Left off B9029 road for Aikey Brae path

(57.52169; -2.06226) <https://w3w.co/dress.cheering.bulge>
In 300 m from leaving the Formartine and Buchan Way path, cross the B9029 road with care and walk up the Aikey Brae* track, with a field on your left side. (1.9 km)

**Note: From the mid 19th Century to the mid 20th Century, one of the most popular summer events in the Buchan area of NE Scotland was the horse fair at Aikey Brae. Thanks to Springthyme Records for this background information for the "bothy ballad" called "Aikey Fair": "... the horse fair at Aikey Brae, two miles south of Maud between New Deer and Auld Deer in the heart of the Buchan countryside, was held once a year on a Wednesday in July from the mid 1800s and a fair with rides and stalls was added to the event in the early 1900s on the Sunday before. The last real horse fair at Aikey took place in 1946. The event attracted folk from far and wide including many of the Scottish traveller fraternity, dealing in horses and selling the usual trinkets, baskets, pegs and tin ware. The song [Aikey Fair] is typical of the later cornkisters ...".*

See: https://www.springthyme.co.uk/ah11/ah11_10.htm



(6) Turn right at circular path junction

(57.51861; -2.06595) <https://w3w.co/flagpole.loudness.broken>
In 400 m, at a junction for the new Aikey Brae Stone Circle circular path, turn right and follow the path as it goes through/past a gate, then bends left to continue uphill, with trees on your right side, and a field on your left side. (2.3 km)



(7) Left for Aikey Brae Stone Circle

(57.51490; -2.07142) <https://w3w.co/takeovers.games.panthers>
In 600 m, turn left at the signed path for Aikey Brae Stone Circle, passing through a small area of newly planted young trees just before the circle itself. (2.9 km)



(8) Aikey Brae Stone Circle

(57.51384; -2.07035) <https://w3w.co/coaster.newsstand.stripped>

In less than 200 m, you will arrive at the Aikey Brae Stone Circle*. After admiring the Circle and the views from Parkhouse Hill, when you are ready, re-trace your steps to the path at Waypoint 7, turn left and walk downhill in a southerly direction towards a minor road, with a new house on the corner of the road, below you. (3.1 km)

**Note: Aikey Brae is a recumbent stone circle from the early Bronze Age. We cannot be certain what the purpose of the many recumbent stone circles in the landscape of the NE Scotland was. There is speculation that ceremonies associated with astronomical observations and the passing of the seasons were held at the circles but there is no certainty. The whale-shaped recumbent stone is about 21.5 tonnes and there are five stones still erected in total. It is a scheduled monument. The circle is between 15 and 16.5 metres wide and surrounded by a ring bank. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aikey_Brae_stone_circle*



(9) Left at road

(57.51363; -2.07477) <https://w3w.co/describe.available.back>

In 400 m from the Stone Circle, walking downhill and in a southerly direction, at a new information board on your left, turn left and downhill onto the minor tarred road. Keep following this road, down then up, and soon turning left to go in a SE direction towards the village of Stuartfield. (3.5 km)



(10) Veer right off road onto footpath

(57.50405; -2.05943) <https://w3w.co/trickster.mere.dislikes>

In 1.9 km, just after a sharp bend, with the village of Stuartfield now clearly visible below you, veer right off the road onto a footpath that runs closely parallel with the road. Soon you must return to the minor road for a short section to pass a house before returning to the final section of footpath that takes you to the outskirts of Stuartfield. Keep going along the pavement of Windmill Street towards The Square. (5.4 km)



(11) Left along pavement at the Stuartfield Bell

(57.50302; -2.04609) <https://w3w.co/reds.help.sprains>

In 800 m, when you reach the x-roads at The Square in Stuartfield*, cross the road with care to check out the metal structure with a bell on top. When you are ready to move on, face North to walk down the pavement of Burnett Street in the direction of Old Deer. Watch out for the pretty duck-pond on the other side of the road at QuartAleHouse Road. Keep walking on the pavement for about 1.1 km, eventually leaving the outskirts of the village. (6.2 km)

**Note: An unpretentious but pleasing-on-the-eye small Buchan village, its name linked to the local Burnet-Stuart lairds. It was formerly known as New Crichtie, established in 1763 to support the age of agricultural improvement. The name Crichtie (Crechy) derives from the Gaelic word for clay, and clay is known to have been dug for bricks, etc, here in past times.*



(12) Cross road and onto footpath

(57.51227; -2.04058) <https://w3w.co/observe.snippet.trifling>

In 1.1 km, where the pavement ends, cross the B9030 road with care to join a footpath on the other side of the road. Soon this path takes you to an entrance for the Old Deer Cemetery. Instead of entering the graveyard, go left here to follow a footpath that takes you around the perimeter of the cemetery. Eventually, this path takes you back to the B9030 road at a lay-by/car-park for the cemetery. Veer left here to walk in a northerly direction for a few metres towards the access to the road. (7.3 km)



(13) Cross road to re-join Old Deer footpath

(57.51383; -2.04125) <https://w3w.co/gurgled.scores.outlooks>

In 500 m from Waypoint 12, cross the busy B9030 road with care to join the next section of the footpath to Old Deer. Walk along the footpath. (7.8 km)



(14) Right off footpath and cross bridge

(57.51641; -2.03860) <https://w3w.co/famous.paint.squirts>

In 300 m, the footpath bends away from the main road to join a minor road close to the perimeter of Aden Park. Turn right off the footpath to walk along the minor tarred road towards a stone bridge over the South Ugie Water. Cross the bridge and walk uphill for a short section towards an entrance to Aden Park. (8.1 km)



(15) Left off road into Aden Park at Twin Lodges

(57.51589; -2.03672) <https://w3w.co/clattered.animated.thrillers>
In less than 200 m, veer left off the minor road into Aden Park* at the ruins of the Twin (South) Lodges. Follow the rough road through woodland. (8.3 km)

**Note: The main access to Aden Country Park is from Mintlaw Station on the A950 road. It is home to the Aberdeenshire Farming Museum, forest walks and a ruined country house.*



(16) Left and down at paths x-roads

(57.51799; -2.03340) <https://w3w.co/maps.scored.unframed>
In 300 m, at a paths x-roads, go left and downhill towards a wooden bridge over the South Ugie Water. Cross the bridge and pass the old Arboretum area on your right, with some fine old trees, where you may wish to divert briefly to check them out. (8.6 km)



(17) Left before stone bridge for path at side of church

(57.51938; -2.03569) <https://w3w.co/rezoning.scans.visitors>
In 300 m, or so, just before a stone bridge, go sharp left to take a narrow path that passes by the north side of Deer Parish Church, soon taking you out onto the B9030, in the centre of Old Deer, where you started the walk. (8.9 km)



(18) Finish walk back at Deer Parish Church

(57.51930; -2.03722) <https://w3w.co/forces.examine.deodorant>

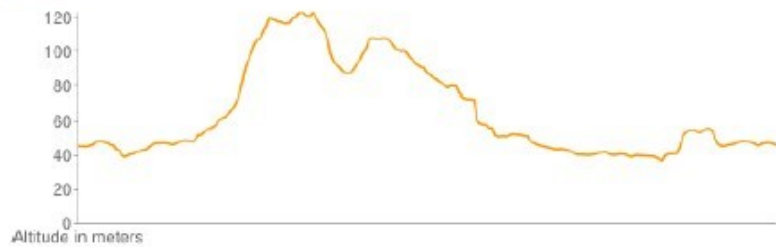
We advise that you take a few minutes at the end of the walk to enter the Deer Parish Church graveyard to check out the remains of the old parish church and associated engraved stonework. (9.1 km)

**Note: The interesting remains of the original church of Old Deer parish are located in the graveyard of the current Deer Parish Church. The church was established in the 15th C or earlier, perhaps with an association with Deer Abbey from the 13th C, and an earlier Christian missionary settlement by the "Culdees" from the 6thC. See: <http://bit.ly/3vIJZSL> and*



<https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/deer/oldkirk/index.html>

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](#)