

# The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

## Pitfichie-River Don Woodlands Circular (Aberdeenshire)

### Route Summary

**\*\*\* Latest walk report (4th Feb 2024): At the western end of Paradise Woods there are a couple of spots with single trees across track but these are easily bypassed. At the west end of Craigton Wood there are a few large trees down making it impossible to walk the spur to view Place of Tillyfoure. This in no way prevents you continuing the circuit around Craigton. \*\*\***

A mostly easy ramble in the very scenic valley of the River Don, south of the Bennachie range of hills. There is a short section in Craigton Wood where the path is a little overgrown. Paradise Wood is an historic designed landscape, notable for the size and variety of conifers.

Duration: 2.5 hours.



### Route Overview

**Duration:** 2.5 hours.

**Transport/Parking:** No public transport links within easy walking distance. There is a small but wide access drive to Paradise Woods at the start of the walk. It is likely that you can park here.

**Length:** 7.160 km / 4.48 mi

**Height Gain:** 124 meter **Height Loss:** 124 meter

**Max Height:** 143 meter **Min Height:** 96 meter

**Surface:** Mostly on good paths and forestry roads. At the start, the path may be very muddy. On the section between Waypoints 5 and 6, the path can be indistinct and overgrown.

**Child Friendly:** Yes, if children are used to walks of this distance. Please ensure that children stay on the path in Paradise Wood in order to protect the environment.

**Difficulty:** Medium.

**Dog Friendly:** Yes, with qualifications. **From April to July, in Paradise Wood, dogs should be kept on a short lead, otherwise there is a risk they will be disturbing ground-nesting birds such as dippers and sandpipers, inhibiting successful breeding.** On lead on public roads and near to any farm livestock.

**Refreshments:** Grant Arms in Monymusk, if open. Options in Kemnay.



**\*Note: Paradise Wood is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) [see below]. Please ensure that you walk responsibly, in line with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. In order to minimise your impact on the environment please keep to the path, and ensure that children and dogs also keep to the path.**

### Description


This is a very pleasant and scenic ramble along the banks of the River Don in the valley between Millstone Hill on the Bennachie range, and Pitfichie Hill and Cairn William on the Menaway range. The first section of the route explores the very special woodland environment that is Paradise Wood\*. Here, you are walking in an historic designed landscape, which also provides a valuable wildlife habitat. The size and variety of conifers growing in Paradise Wood is particularly notable. The Monymusk Estate was acquired by the Grant family in 1712 and Archibald Grant was made factor on his 20th birthday in 1716. Over the following



62 years Archibald, later 2nd Baronet, transformed the estate into one of the best examples of 18th century agricultural improvements. In the course of laying out a large formal landscape he planted over 48 million trees, including at Paradise Wood. See: <http://bit.ly/3eStbkW> . After Paradise Wood, and before Craigton Wood, there is an opportunity to enjoy the best views of the River Don and the surrounding hills and farmland. At the mid-point on the walk we catch a glimpse, across the River Don, of the "Place of Tilliefour", which started life as a small fortified house for the Earldom of Mar. It originates from the 16th century, although it enjoyed a major restoration and extension in 1884. Eventually, the lands passed to the Gordon family. See: <https://bit.ly/3eTp34t>. At the beginning and end of the walk you will enjoy passing Paradise Cottage, where there is an interesting garden with an old telephone box, extensive topiary, garden sculptures and an old railway carriage.

Our website link: <https://themackwalks.wordpress.com/2018/10/29/035-pitfichie-river-don-woodlands-circular-aberdeenshire/>

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<p><b>SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE</b></p> 	<p><b>PARADISE WOOD SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST</b></p> <p><b>MANAGEMENT STATEMENT</b></p>
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*This Statement, which provides advice on recommended management for this SSSI, does not affect, or form part of its statutory notification*

<b>Location</b>	Paradise Wood lies approximately 3km north of Monymusk
<b>Council Area(s)</b>	Aberdeenshire
<b>Grid Reference</b>	NJ678184
<b>Area (ha)</b>	31.3
<b>Date Notified SSSI</b>	28 July 1983
<b>Other Designations</b>	None
<b>Tenure</b>	One private owner

**Summary Description/Evaluation**

Paradise Wood is one of the oldest, largest and least disturbed oak woodlands in north east Scotland. While the oak wood is of principal importance, the special interest is enhanced by transitions to other woodland types, marking changes in soil type and moisture levels.

The lower parts of the woodland on damper alluvial soils by the River Don and adjacent to smaller burns draining the site, support ash-wych elm woodland with bird cherry and alder. On the drier, higher and more acid slopes the oak woodland grades into Scots pine and birch wood. The ground flora is unusually diverse owing to the variety of soil types, and many of the rarer species associated with ancient broadleaved woodland in the North East are represented (more so than any other woodland in the region). These include moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina*, sweet woodruff *Galium odoratum*, three-veined sandwort *Moehringia trinerva* and wood millet *Milium effusum*.

The riverside section of the wood contains well grown non native specimen trees laid out as an arboretum and woodland garden in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The trees include beech, larch and yew, The gardens have long reverted to more native woodland habitat, although a number of former garden species remain.

In addition to its flora, Paradise wood is considered to have one of the richest faunas of broadleaved woodland in the North East, and is one of the two best sites in Aberdeenshire for terrestrial molluscs.

See: <https://apps.snh.gov.uk/sitelink-api/v1/sites/1271/documents/3>

## Waypoints

### (1) Start walk at entrance to Paradise Woods

(57.24934; -2.53482)

Start the walk at the entrance to Paradise Woods, in the lane adjoining Paradise Cottage. The cottage, marked as Ordmill on the OS map, is 3 km out of Monymusk on the minor access road that passes Pitfichie Castle. Pass through the metal pedestrian gate to enter the woods, noticing the old telephone box, topiary, garden sculptures and old railway carriage on your left in the garden of Paradise Cottage. Carry on following the path through the woods, soon running parallel with the River Don in the very scenic area known as 'My Lord's Throat'. There are many fine trees, including huge Redwoods, to admire. Follow the path as it eventually leaves the woods into an open field, with the river close on your right-hand side.



### (2) Left then right to go around Milldownrie farm house

(57.25932; -2.55199)

After 2km, you arrive at a patch of trees, protecting the Milldownrie\* former farm-house, and farm buildings. Go left, away from the river-side, when you meet the trees then follow a path that goes slightly uphill and swings to the right, skirting around all the buildings. (2 km)

*\*Note: walkers must ensure that, in line with the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#), they respect the privacy of the residents at Milldownrie Farm. They should also be aware of the risks of encountering large farm machinery. Walkers should ensure that dogs are on lead and that any "poo bags" used on the walk are disposed of in an appropriate public bin for that purpose, or taken home for disposal. Please see the Scottish Access Code leaflet "Responsible dog walking in Scotland": <https://bit.ly/3p3u5zQ>*



### (3) Pass farm buildings on way back to riverside

(57.25883; -2.55288)

In 100 m, or so, cross the access road to Milldownrie farm-house and veer right and downhill past the old farm buildings to get back to the riverside. Follow an indistinct tractor track along the edge of the river, veering left away from the river a little when you encounter trees and a burn. (2.1 km)



### (4) Cross bridge over burn and head back to riverside

(57.25837; -2.55659)

In 300 m, having turned left, away from the river for a short distance, go right and over the small bridge over the burn and into the next field. After crossing the bridge, go right, in the direction of the river-side. Continue walking along the river-side as you approach a wood, ahead of you. (2.4 km)



## (5) Leave field for path along old forestry road

(57.25991; -2.56153)

In 400 m from the bridge between the fields, head for the corner of the field nearest to the riverside. Here, there is a post with the number "3" on a small board (presumably indicating the number of a fishing beat). Veer left into the trees here (there is no path to follow at this point). Soon, in about 20 m, you will arrive at an old grassy forestry road in Craigton Wood, but badly overgrown with bracken and overhanging branches in places. Carry on heading west, with the river on your right, following the line of this grassy road. Soon, you will identify that there is a narrow path on the line of the road, possibly used by wild animals more than by walkers. (2.8 km)



## (6) At clearing go straight ahead

(57.26308; -2.56654)

In 500 m, the grassy road/path emerges into a wide clearing with hard-surfaced forestry road. Keep going straight on at this stage along the forestry road, into Overton Wood, with the river on your right. In about 200m, look out for a building starting to appear on the opposite side of the river, below you on your right. (3.3 km)



## (7) Off forest road to view Place of Tilliefoure

(57.26470; -2.56807)

In about 200 m, you will clearly see that there is a large building on the other side of the river, below you on your right. We suggest you go right here, for a short distance into the trees, to the top of the high river-bank, to more clearly see the building. This is the unusually named "Place of Tilliefoure"\*. When you are ready, re-trace your steps back along the forestry road to Waypoint 6, in the wide clearing. Go right there, to follow the forestry road around the southern side of Craigton Wood, and to eventually leave the wood. Keep following this road for about 2 km. (3.5 km)

*\*Note: The Place of Tilliefoure started life as a small fortified house, originating from the 16th century, although it enjoyed a major restoration and extension in 1884. Originally Tilliefoure belonged to the Earldom of Mar and was used for hunting. The lands were forfeited to the Scottish Crown in the 15th century, and bestowed by James IV on Sir John Leslie of Wardhouse in 1508. Sir John died in 1640. His widow was married to Sir Alexander Gordon of Cluny within six months of his death, and the lands passed to the Gordon family. See: [http://gordoncastles.wikia.com/wiki/Place\\_of\\_Tilliefoure](http://gordoncastles.wikia.com/wiki/Place_of_Tilliefoure)*



### (8) Right at t-junction

(57.25706; -2.55291)

In 2km, after a large metal gate, the forestry road emerges at a t-junction with access road for Milldownrie farm that you passed at Waypoint 3. Go right here to follow the access road south towards the public road. (5.5 km)



### (9) Left onto tarred road

(57.25381; -2.55313)

After 400 m, the Milldownrie access road meets the tarred public road. Go left here to walk back (for about 1.3 km) towards your walk start-point along this narrow (and very quiet) road. Take care to get off the road when any vehicles approach. (5.9 km)



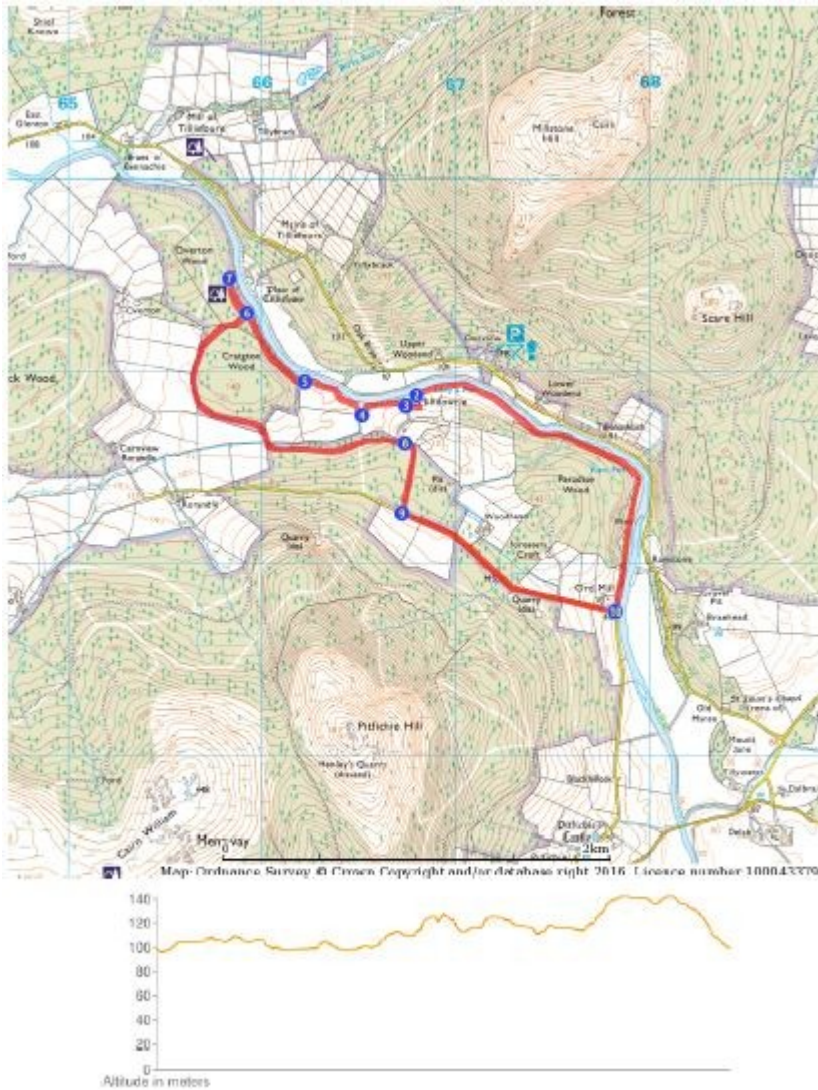
### (10) Finish walk at road-end by Paradise Cottage

(57.24927; -2.53482)

After 1.3 km you will arrive back at your walk start-point. You can hardly avoid noticing the impressive and extensive topiary at Paradise Cottage. (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](#)