

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Tarland-Muirton Wood-Culsh Earth House Loop (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

A fairly easy ramble in the Howe of Cromar, well known for its beautiful rolling patchwork of fields and woodlands set against a mountain backdrop to the West. The key historical point of interest on the route is the ancient "souterrain" known as the Culsh Earth House.

Duration: 2.5 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Infrequent Stagecoach bus options. Check timetables. There is a small rough-surfaced car-park at the walk start/end point.

Length: 7.180 km / 4.49 mi

Height Gain: 134 meter. **Height Loss:** 134 meter.

Max Height: 205 meter. **Min Height:** 144 meter.

Surface: Moderate. A mix of good woodland paths and tarred surfaces. Some sections may be muddy after wet weather. The route is suitable for off-road mobility scooters, although please note that there is a 200 meter section on the busy B9119 road, approaching and leaving the Culsh Earth House.

Difficulty: Easy.

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

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

Refreshments: The Tarland Tearooms, the Commercial Hotel, and, the Aberdeen Arms, all in Tarland.



Description

This pleasant rural walk, in an extended figure of eight loop, happily mixes mature pine and birch woodland in Muirton Wood with open farmland. There are a number of points of historical interest along the way to complement the fine views on all sides of the Howe of Cromar, Mount Keen, Lochnagar, and Morven Hill. These views are best enjoyed from the Sun Seat, a recently built community initiative comprised of a substantial stone edifice on the hillside east of Muirton Wood, about 2 km into the walk. Not far from here, we pass a converted "horse mill", with the circular stone platform for the horses to walk around whilst driving the mill wheels still visible at the rear of the now private residence. Next, at the return point on the route, we visit the Culsh Earth House (or "Souterrain"), a well-preserved stone-built underground passage, 14 m in length, which may be around 2,000 years old and is most probably an ancient storage cellar for grain and other agricultural produce. It is likely that it would have sat beside, or was connected to, an Iron Age roundhouse farmstead. On the return leg we visit the old walled garden, now a community asset, at the "fermtoun" of Oldtown of Kincaigie, where there are old-style straw beehives in alcoves on the wall, built for that purpose. Re-gaining Muirton Wood, and after encountering a scenic corner on the Tarland golf course, we pass Alastrea House, now a care home, but built as a residence by the tragic land-owning MacRobert family, who lost three sons in flying incidents before and during WWII. If arriving by car from Aberdeen on the B9119 try not to miss the "Queen's View" viewpoint on your left as you enter the Howe. There is a small car-park across the road. The village of Tarland itself has a fine old Square with some buildings dating back around 300 years.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at car-park at NW corner of Muirton Wood

(57.13369; -2.85162) <https://w3w.co/parading.ringers.commoners>

The walk starts from a small car-park on the north-west edge of Muirton Wood, on the outskirts of Tarland. Turn left off the B9119 road as you enter the village from the Aberdeen direction. After checking out the information board about Tarland walks, take the path going into the wood.



(2) At fork in path veer left

(57.13348; -2.85140) <https://w3w.co/readily.offers.sped>

Almost immediately there is a fork in the path. Take the main path veering slightly left/straight ahead. Soon, in about 150 m, the path meets another path at an angled junction. Keep going in an easterly direction, veering slightly left, away from the car-park where you started. (26 m)



(3) Veer slightly left - away from access road

(57.13196; -2.84483) <https://w3w.co/tone.hatch.recapture>

In 500 m, the path offers to meet the west access road to Alastrean House. Instead of joining the access road, veer left at the walks guide post to follow the path that continues ENE through the trees. Soon, this path meets the north access road for the House. Cross the access road and carry on taking the path through the trees. (507 m)



(4) Left onto rough road

(57.13146; -2.83817) <https://w3w.co/hires.found.manly>

In 470 m, the path meets a rough estate road at a walks guide post. Turn left to follow this rough road, which soon becomes a wide path as it starts to descend and veer right towards a bridge over a small burn. (979 m)



(5) Cross footbridge and straight on - up beech avenue

(57.13127; -2.83457) <https://w3w.co/disengage.deodorant.strong>
In 220 m, where two small burns meet, cross the footbridge immediately ahead of you and carry straight on, ignoring options to go left and right, walking through the avenue of young beech trees in an ENE direction as it starts to gently ascend, with fields on either side. (1.2 km)



(6) Sun seat

(57.13314; -2.82608) <https://w3w.co/lilac.presides.fact>
In 600 m, at the top of the avenue of young beech trees on your right is the stone construction known as the Sun Seat*, both for its sunny position and the representation of the sun built into the wall behind the seating area. There are great views over the Howe of Cromar towards Tarland and Morven Hill. After enjoying the resting point and the view, carry on taking the path through an area of young trees. A large hummock on your right may be man-made, from prehistoric times, but has yet to be investigated. (1.8 km)

**Note: The Sun Seat was designed by Dave and Simon Power, and built by local stonemason, Dave Bullock, in 2009.*



(7) Left and along tarred road

(57.13305; -2.82456) <https://w3w.co/modes.unwound.lunch>
In 100 m, or so, the path meets a narrow tarred road. Go left here. (1.9 km)



(8) Old horse mill

(57.13392; -2.82414) <https://w3w.co/panicking.hips.differ>
In another 100 m, or so, you will pass a private house on your left. This is a converted 'horse mill*'. The raised stone platform around which the horses driving the mill would have walked is just visible behind the house (please ensure you do not disturb the privacy of the residents). Carry on taking the tarred road as you pass the house. (2.0 km)

**Note: See this link for more info about horse mills: <http://www.alfordimages.com/picture/number867.asp?c=ok>*



(9) Right onto B9119 road

(57.13825; -2.82208) <https://w3w.co/trackers.dubbing.distract>
In 600 m, at a wooden shelter, the narrow tarred road has ascended to meet the B9119 main road. Turn right here to walk along the verge of this busy road for about 200 m, facing the oncoming traffic. We advise that you stop and step off the road when vehicles are coming towards you. (2.6 km)



(10) Culsh Earth House

(57.13760; -2.81963) <https://w3w.co/ambition.gobblers.champions>
In 200 m, you will come across the signage for the Culsh Earth House* and an interpretation board from Historic Environment Scotland. The so-called 'earth house' (or 'Souterrain') may be around 2,000 years old and is most probably an ancient underground storage cellar for grain and other agricultural produce. It may have sat beside or was attached to an Iron Age roundhouse farmstead. After investigating the underground structure (the curved length is almost 14 m, and you'll need a torch to see much further than the entrance), re-trace your steps back along the B9119 road (opposite side, for safety!), then return down the narrow tarred access road you were on earlier, passing the horse mill house at Waypoint 8 and continuing on the tarred surface past the path from the Sun Seat at Waypoint 7. (2.8 km)



*Note: for more information, see: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/culsh-earth-house/history/> and <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/tarland/culshearthhouse/index.html>

(11) Oldtown Community Garden

(57.13120; -2.82593) <https://w3w.co/rooks.restores.tones>
In 1.1 km from the Culsh Earth House, turn right off the narrow tarred road to check out the community garden at the old walled garden of the Oldtown of Kinraigie farm nearby. There are beehives here and an area at the far-left corner where there are recesses in the stone wall for old-style beehives. (3.9 km)



(12) Beehive alcoves

(57.13149; -2.82589) <https://w3w.co/fantastic.airbag.stupidly>
The area, with hives, at the far-left corner was closed off the day we visited the walled garden, but the old-style straw hives were still visible through the wire mesh enclosure. There is a bench in the garden if you want to take a moment to relax in the quiet rural environment. When you are ready to move on, leave the garden and carry on down the narrow tarred public road, passing between the farm buildings at Oldtown of Kinraigie. (4.0 km)



(13) Right onto Coull-Tarland minor road

(57.12576; -2.83256) <https://w3w.co/glance.clincher.madder>
In 900 m you will arrive at a t-junction with the Coull-Tarland minor road. Turn right here to head back in the direction of Tarland. For safety, walk on the right side of the road, facing oncoming traffic. (4.9 km)



(14) Right to re-enter Muirton Wood

(57.12776; -2.83810) <https://w3w.co/indoors.irritate.cult>
In another 400 m, ignoring the first gated entrance on your right (to a quarry), take the second gate to re-enter the Muirton Woods. Follow the track as it eventually bends left around the Tarland Golf Course on your left side, towards Alastrean House. (5.3 km)



(15) Alastrean House

(57.13174; -2.84291) <https://w3w.co/shaped.beauty.annoys>
In 600 m, at the entrance drive to Alastrean House* (now a care home), take the access drive going west, away from the house, towards Tarland village. (5.9 km)

**Note: Alastrean House, formerly known as the House of Cromar, is one of two large country house on the estate, Douneside House being the other. It was built in 1905 by Lord Aberdeen, as a country retreat for his wife, and was originally surrounded by 9,000 acres of agricultural land which made up the Cromar Estate. An arrangement made in 1920 between Lord Aberdeen and his friend and neighbour, Sir Alexander MacRobert, saw the Cromar Estate and house eventually pass to Lady MacRobert in 1934. The house was to be for the use of the MacRobert boys and their families, but sadly they never had a chance to use it extensively. For the tragic story, see: <http://www.themacroberttrust.org.uk/about-the-trust/history/>*



(16) Left off access drive

(57.13187; -2.84480) <https://w3w.co/opponent.showcase.vans>
In 100 m, or so, (at walk safety posts, and opposite Waypoint 3 on the outward leg), go left off the tarred access drive to take a path into the trees. (6.0 km)



(17) MacRobert Mausoleum

(57.13051; -2.84703) <https://w3w.co/welcome.orchestra.perusing>
In 200 m, or so, you will emerge from the trees into an open grassy area with bench to enjoy the fine view over the golf course. Just beyond the bench, to your right, at the edge of the trees is the granite-built MacRobert Mausoleum*. After checking the unusual structure, carry on taking the path going west towards Tarland as it re-enters the woodland. (6.2 km)

**Note: [with thanks, from the Tarland History Walks 2 leaflet] '... [the mausoleum] contains only the ashes of Alasdair MacRobert [see info link at Waypoint 15] ... It was designed by William Heughan to resemble a cairn and built by a Mr Leslie, stonemason of Torphins, in 1938 ...'*



(18) Veer left off waymarked path

(57.13036; -2.84753) <https://w3w.co/corporate.goodbye.oatmeal>
In less than 100 m from the mausoleum, veer left off the main waymarked path to follow a narrower path, nearer to the golf course on your left side. Fairly soon, this path emerges onto the tarred access road you left earlier. Carry on in a westerly direction for the short distance to the outskirts of Tarland. (6.3 km)



(19) St Moulag's Church

(57.12982; -2.85318) <https://w3w.co/video.stunt.highs>
In 300 m, you will pass St Moulag's Church on your right side. After appreciating this fine building, carry on for a short distance, along Cromar Drive, past the Golf Clubhouse on your left, to meet the Aberdeen Road. (6.6 km)

**Note: Saint Moluag (c. 510–592) was a Christian missionary. A contemporary of Saint Columba, he worked to evangelise Pictish society.*



(20) Veer right and up B9119 - Aberdeen Road

(57.12997; -2.85451) <https://w3w.co/magnets.poets.hissing>

In 100 m, veer right and gently uphill at the junction with the B9119 Aberdeen Road. Cross the road and turn right to walk along the pavement, heading for your start-point at the north-eastern outskirts of Tarland. (6.7 km)



(21) Finish walk back at little car-park

(57.13370; -2.85173)

<https://w3w.co/parading.ringers.commoners>

In 500 m, cross the B9119 road with care, to arrive at the little woodside car-park where you started the walk. (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](#)