

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Back o'Bennachie-Oxen Craig-Watch Craig Circular (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

The first half of this walk involves an unrelenting ascent on well-maintained paths through pine forest and then heather moorland to the peak of Oxen Craig. The traverse to Watch Craig and return leg, in the lee of Hummell Craig, are on less well-known paths. Great hilltop views.

Duration: 3 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: No bus service to the Back o'Bennachie car-park. The signposted turn-off for the car-parking area is about 1 km west of Oyne on the B9002 road to Insch. There is a Forestry Commission car-park. Charges apply.

Length: 6.770 km / 4.23 mi

Height Gain: 384 meter **Height Loss:** 384 meter

Max Height: 511 meter **Min Height:** 171 meter

Surface: Moderate. There is a fairly relentless initial ascent to Oxen Craig, but on good paths. After Oxen Craig the less well-used route with unmaintained paths is likely to be muddy in places. Not suitable for off-road mobility vehicles due to steps and narrow paths through heather.

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

Difficulty: Medium.

Dog Friendly: Yes, keep dogs on lead in car-parking area.

Refreshments: Options in Insch and Inverurie.



Description

Despite the proximity to rolling farmland, this feels like a real hill-walk, taking in pine forest, heather moorland and rocky granite tors. The initial ascent is fairly unrelenting, but the scenic rewards are soon manifested. On the way up to Oxen Craig there is an opportunity to visit the 19th C quarry at Little Oxen Craig, a rocky knuckle on the hillside where there is an information board and some abandoned examples of the granite lintels produced there. A road from the quarry was washed away in 1891 when a waterspout hit the hill. The partially dressed stones could not be removed and have remained ever since. Oxen Craig is the highest point of the Bennachie range and provides a fine viewpoint. The nearby tors of Craigshannoch, Mither Tap, Millstone Hill, and Watch Craig are prominent, and a viewfinder enables you to identify more distant visible summits. On a clear day you can readily pick out the following hill-tops: Clach na Ben; Mount Keen; Lochnagar; Morven; Ben An; Buck of Cabrach; Tap o'Noth; Ben Rinnes. From Oxen Craig we leave the popular and well-maintained route going east to the Mither Tap to instead go west to the summit of Watch Craig, about 1 km away. There are tremendous views from this top of the Don valley and the Vale of Alford. At the rocky top, carved into the bedrock, are the letters A, A, P, standing for Ardoyne, Auchindoir and Premnay, and referring to the land allocation to the three estates on the division of the commony of Bennachie in 1859. The return route, between Hermit's Seat and Hummell Craig provides ample opportunity to appreciate the rolling Garioch countryside below you.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Back o'Bennachie car-park

(57.31046; -2.56307)

The walk starts from the Back o'Bennachie car-park (remember to buy a parking permit - £2 for 24 hours at Jan 2019). After checking out the Forestry Commission information board, take the obvious path going gently uphill through the trees, with the Gillree burn on your right side.



(2) Take Mither Tap route from forest road

(57.30750; -2.56442)

In about 350 m, the path meets a forestry road. A little to your right is a walks signpost. Take the path uphill through the trees marked for the Mither Tap Trail. Keep following any signs for the Mither Tap Trail, avoiding any turn-offs to right or left. Continue following the path as it eventually emerges from the trees into heather moorland and continues uphill. Do not depart from the well-maintained main path. (342 m)



(3) Right for Little Oxen Craig quarry

(57.29847; -2.55839)

After 1.35 km of fairly remorseless ascent, go right to take the signed path for the Little Oxen Craig quarry*. (1.7 km)

Note: The quarry operated during the 19th C producing granite lintels.



(4) Follow rough path out of quarry

(57.29827; -2.55953)

In 100 m you arrive at the long abandoned small quarry. After checking out the information board, abandoned stone lintels, and views of the countryside below, veer right (looking at the info board from the front) through the stone debris of the quarry to find a narrow path that swings up and around to the left behind the summit tap of Little Oxen Craig. This path will return you, a little further uphill, to the original main path you were on before diverting to the quarry. If you find this initially stony path difficult to negotiate, then just re-trace your steps back to Waypoint 3 and proceed on the main path, uphill. (1.8 km)



(5) Right onto path for Oxen Craig

(57.29726; -2.55881)

In 100 m, or so, upon meeting the main path uphill, go right to join it. Eventually, you draw close to the large rocky tap of Oxen Craig. (1.9 km)



(6) Summit of Oxen Craig

(57.29315; -2.56091)

In 600 m, or so, you are at the Oxen Craig tap. You may ascend directly on the north side or follow the path around to the east side and ascend from there. Despite appearances to the contrary, this is the highest peak on the Bennachie range. There is a useful viewfinder and fine views in all directions. (2.5 km)



(7) Take path down south-west side of Oxen Craig

(57.29297; -2.56082)

Just 20 m, or so, from the circular viewfinder, take the narrow path down the south-west side of Oxen Craig (you are heading for the Watch Craig tap which is prominent in the middle distance, about 1 km away). Note that this path is initially quite rough and stony and may involve some light scrambling. Take care, but there are no precipitous drops to worry about! Follow the path through the heather moorland as it descends into the valley between Oxen Craig and Watch Craig before rising to ascend the slope to the summit of Watch Craig. Don't take any paths to right or left. (2.5 km)



(8) Summit of Watch Craig - view back to Oxen Craig

(57.29081; -2.57674)

In 1.1 km, you arrive at the summit of Watch Craig, where there are marvellous views of the valley of the River Don, the Vale of Alford, and the Cairngorms in the distance. When you are ready, re-trace your steps down from the summit, looking out for a path to your left in about 100 m. (3.6 km)



(9) Go left when descending from Watch Craig

(57.29192; -2.57506)

In about 100 m, from the summit of Watch Craig, take the path to your left. Follow this path as it initially rises then starts to descend, with views of the open countryside on the north side of Bennachie, where you started the walk. Note that in about 750 m, the path swings sharply right across the hill for about 200 m towards Hummell Craig before descending again, with the final section going through trees to meet a wide forest road. (3.7 km)



(10) Right on meeting forest road

(57.30673; -2.57777)

After 2 km, you will emerge at a wide forest road. Go right here. (5.7 km)



(11) Left and downhill at y-junction

(57.30757; -2.57286)

In 300 m you will arrive at a fork in the forest road. Go left and downhill here. (6.0 km)



(12) Right into picnic area then across bridge

(57.31076; -2.56483)

In 700 m, passing a grassy picnic area on your right, go right onto the grassy area by a green post, then veer left, making for a wooden bridge over the Gillree Burn ahead of you. (6.7 km)



(13) Across wooden bridge to finish back at start-point

(57.31045; -2.56325)

In 100 m, or so, after crossing the wooden bridge, you are back in the car-parking area where you started the walk. (6.8 km)



Route Map



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Links:

[Photos from walk](#)

[Download Route Guide](#) (PDF with illustrated Waypoints)

[Download GPX file](#) (GPS Exchange Format)

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