

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Tarland-Pittenderich Cairn Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

In clear weather there are so many temptations on this walk to stop and take in the fantastic views of the Howe of Cromar countryside and surrounding hills with a breath-taking wider mountain backdrop. The overall ascent and distance are achieved in a pleasing and gradual way.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Infrequent Stagecoach bus options. Check timetables. There is a small car-parking area at the walk start/end point on School Road.

Length: 10.000 km / 6.25 mi

Height Gain: 363 meter.

Height Loss: 363 meter.

Max Height: 500 meter.

Min Height: 154 meter.

Surface: Moderate. A mix of tarred roads, farm and forestry tracks, and, mostly, good paths.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

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

Refreshments: We can recommend Angie's Cafe and the Commercial Hotel in Tarland Square. Other options: Aberdeen Arms, and Tarland Pharmacy and Coffee Shop.



Description

We often enthuse about the wonderful views we enjoy on our walking expeditions. However, undertaken on a clear day, this walk must rank as one of our very best routes for all-around scenic quality. There are very few points on the track where there are not extremely fine views of the Howe of Cromar, and towards Mount Keen, ("Dark") Lochnagar, and the distant Cairngorms. Much closer, and ever-present, are constantly changing views of the imposing "whale's back" mass of Morven Hill ("A' Mhòr Bheinn", in Gaelic), immortalised by Lord Byron: "...when I rov'd a young Highlander o'er the dark heath, And climb'd thy steep summit, oh Morven of snow ...". At the summit cairn of Pittenderich, extensive views open up to the north, east and south-east, with the Bennachie range being most prominent. Although the overall ascent (363 m) is not inconsiderable for a low hill-walk, the gradient is generally spread throughout the ascent in a pleasant environment characterised by mixed farmland and woodland, making the walk far easier an experience than anticipated. At an early stage in the route, the walk passes the former country mansion of Douneside House, set in open parkland and gardens. Douneside now operates as an hotel and health club, within a wider estate managed by the MacRobert Trust which follows the wishes of the late Lady MacRobert for the House to remain a place of tranquillity and peace [see the notes at Waypoint 3 for a brief account of the MacRobert family tragedies around WW II]. The focal point of the walk is the summit cairn on Pittenderich at 508 m, a southern spur of Pressendye. The cairn is assumed to be a pre-historic burial location, perhaps used by different communities, at different times, over the millennia, but, as far as we can ascertain, no excavation has ever taken place at the site to shed more light. The walk starts and ends at the village of Tarland, which has a fine old Square with some buildings dating back around 300 years.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk opposite park on School Road

(57.13069; -2.85883) <https://w3w.co/anthems.polka.circling>

Start the walk from a small car-parking area beside the green space on School Road, in Tarland. From there, turn right, then right again to walk up Aberdeen Terrace. At the end of the cul-de-sac, join the path between gardens.



(2) Left at top of steps

(57.13143; -2.85780) <https://w3w.co/venturing.point.excusing>

In about 160 m, climb the steps at the end of the path and turn left. Soon, at the end of the street, veer slightly right to join a wide grassy path, with views to Morven opening up on your left side as you pass houses on your right. (161 m)



(3) Left up tarred road

(57.13418; -2.85775) <https://w3w.co/spindles.foggy.courier>

In just over 300 m, the grassy path ends where it meets a tarred road. Go left up the tarred road. This road is the access road to Douneside House*, now a hotel and leisure club, set in very pretty grounds. Keep going, walking up the tarred road as it passes Douneside House. (477 m)

**Note: [from the MacRobert Trust website - thanks] '... Sir Alexander MacRobert purchased the Burnside Estate (now known as Douneside House) as a holiday home for his family in 1888. During the early 1900s, the MacRobert family added extra rooms and a tower, transforming the property into the spectacular country house and gardens which are to be admired today. Sir Alexander and Lady MacRobert had three sons, all of whom died under tragic circumstances. The eldest, Sir Alasdair, was killed in pre-war times during an aviation accident in Luton. His younger brothers were both commissioned in the Royal Air Force, Sir Roderic as a pilot and Sir Ian as a pilot officer. Both of them were killed within six weeks of each other during the Second World War. The MacRobert family were well known locally as significant philanthropists, which is why, following her sons' deaths, Lady MacRobert decided to set up a charitable trust in their honour. Today, Douneside House is owned and run by the MacRobert Trust in memory of Lady MacRobert, who wished for the House to remain a place of tranquillity and peace ...'*



<https://www.dounesidehouse.co.uk/about/history/>

(4) Take left turn - away from Ranna Farm

(57.14635; -2.85475) <https://w3w.co/symphonic.molars.abacus>
After 1.5 km, with Ranna Farm on your right, follow the tarred road as it turns sharp left. (2.0 km)



(5) Carry straight on - onto rough farm road

(57.14860; -2.85775) <https://w3w.co/bowls.buggy.sampled>
In another 300 m, or so, where the tarred road bends sharp left to descend to houses, carry straight on down a rough farm road. (2.3 km)



(6) Right - over stile and uphill

(57.15337; -2.85257) <https://w3w.co/townhouse.jumps.abode>
In 700 m, at a gate into a field, go right over a stile and walk uphill along the belt of beech trees. (3.0 km)



(7) Through gate and bend left on track through trees

(57.15263; -2.84986) <https://w3w.co/taxed.notched.sensual>
In 100 m, or so, at the top of the line of beech trees, veer left through a gate to go through another gate, facing a conifer plantation. Follow the rough track as it bends left into the dense wood. Keep following this track as it clears the plantation and eventually bends sharp right to climb, more steeply, up the grassy hillside. (3.1 km)



(8) Left and uphill at paths x-roads

(57.15386; -2.84307) <https://w3w.co/slowness.remark.funded>

In 700 m, at a paths x-roads on the grassy and heathery hillside, go left to follow the main path going up the hill towards the pine forest, eventually entering the trees. (3.8 km)



(9) Left at t-junction - onto forest road

(57.15773; -2.83960) <https://w3w.co/ascendant.frozen.sailors>

In 600 m, the track meets a forest road. Go left here. (4.4 km)



(10) Right and uphill

(57.16056; -2.83896) <https://w3w.co/token.custard.eggshell>

After walking uphill for 300 m, turn right and go uphill more steeply between the trees. (4.7 km)



(11) Right onto access path for Pittenderich summit cairn

(57.16004; -2.83386) <https://w3w.co/chase.craftsman.reflected>

In another 300 m, turn sharp right at a walks post, to walk up an access path to the Pittenderich summit cairn. (5.0 km)



(12) Pittenderich summit cairn

(57.15937; -2.83455) <https://w3w.co/generated.confused.career>
In 100 m, you will arrive at the impressively large summit cairn*. It is over 20m in diameter and is at least 3m high. After investigating the cairn and enjoying the views, re-trace your steps down the access path. At the post, where the access path starts, turn right to follow the path going downhill in an ESE direction. This path becomes quite steep as it makes its way down to a forestry road. (5.1 km)

**Note: [from Britannica - thanks] '... Burial cairns date primarily from the Neolithic Period and the Early Bronze Age. Cairns are still used in some parts of the world as burial places, particularly where the soil is difficult to excavate or where wild animals might disturb the body. The term cairn is sometimes used interchangeably with barrow ...' This cairn is assumed to be a pre-historic burial location, perhaps used by different communities, at different times, over the millennia, but, as far as can ascertain, no excavation has ever taken place at the site to shed more light. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cairn>*



(13) Right along forest road

(57.15824; -2.82759) <https://w3w.co/lyricist.viewing.purifier>
In 600 m, where the path meets a forest road, go right along the road. (5.7 km)



(14) Left and downhill

(57.15549; -2.83084) <https://w3w.co/translate.budgeted.atoms>
In 400 m, opposite a walks post, veer left and downhill off the main forestry road to follow a grassy road down through the mature pine trees. (6.1 km)



(15) Carry straight on at angled t-junction

(57.15508; -2.83488) <https://w3w.co/disco.vocab.munch>

In 300 m, at a junction with a more used/defined rough road, ignore the turn left indicated on a walks post, and, instead, carry straight on, in a westerly direction. Keep following this rough road as it, fairly soon, exits from the forest into an open grassy/heathery environment. (6.4 km)



(16) Right off rough road onto path through trees

(57.15108; -2.84407) <https://w3w.co/fills.ringside.slumped>

In 700 m, where the rough road bends left and downhill as it meets more woodland on the right, veer right off the rough road onto the path winding through trees. Keep following this path as it goes gently downhill and eventually runs along the side of fields behind Ranna Farm that you passed earlier at Waypoint 4, and then passes above Douneside House on its eastern side. After about 1.5 km, the path takes a sharp right to follow a path between a narrow avenue of beech trees, south of Douneside House. This path ends at the tarred access road you walked up after Waypoint 3. From there, go left to re-trace your steps back to your start point on School Road in the village of Tarland. (7.1km)



(17) Finish walk back at School Road

(57.13068; -2.85871) <https://w3w.co/anthems.polka.circling>

After 2.9 km, you will have returned back to your start-point beside the little park on School Road, in Tarland. (10.0 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](#)