

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Dunecht Policies and Barmekin Hill (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This walk combines an enjoyable mix of landscapes with an historical and architectural interest. The walk progresses through the grounds of an impressively large and flamboyant mansion house onto mixed farmland before climbing to a marvellous viewpoint on an Iron-Age hill-fort.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



Route Overview

Duration: 3.5 hours.

Transport/Parking: No public transport nearby. There is limited parking on the hard verge at the walk start/end point.

Length: 9.270 km / 5.79 mi

Height Gain: 239 meter. **Height Loss:** 239 meter.

Max Height: 269 meter. **Min Height:** 103 meter.

Surface: Moderate. A mix of tarred roads, estate roads and paths. The section up and over the Barmekin Hill is much rougher and likely to be very muddy in places.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

Dog Friendly: Yes. Keep your dog under close control on public roads and near farm animals.

Refreshments: Jaffs Bar/Restaurant in Dunecht. Options in Westhill.



Description

This walk enjoys a stimulating mix of rural environments, with the route leading through the landscaped policies of a large Victorian mansion house, the surrounding mixed farmland, and much wilder and more elemental ascent of the heather-clad Barmekin Hill, where there are impressive remains of an ancient hill-fort. At a fairly early stage, the route passes Dunecht House, a category A listed mansion house set within some 1,700 acres of designed landscape. The extensive grounds, including gardens, woodland, parkland and lochs, are included on the prestigious Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland. The barony of Echt had been in the hands of the Forbes family since 1469 and the original mansion house was built in 1705. The Grecian inspired replacement building was commissioned in 1820 by William Forbes, who employed the notable Aberdeen City Architect, John Smith, to undertake the design. In 1845 the property was bought by Lord Lindsay, later the 25th Earl of Crawford and the 8th Earl of Balcarres, with the proceeds of his family's wealth from Lancashire coal. By 1859 the house was extended by architect Smith's son. In the following decade a huge chapel and large library were both built in the then fashionable 'Lombardic' style. Next, passing through a small private golf course, the walk skirts a large and scenic ornamental loch, before a section on minor roads through the farmland neighbouring the Dunecht Estate. For us, however, the focal point on the route is the section up and over the Barmekin of Echt hill. Here, there are the remains of what must have been a very impressive prehistoric hill-fort, comprising 5 huge concentric stone and earth ramparts surrounding the summit. The panoramic views from the top are extensive and, taking that alongside the steep and fairly uniform slopes of the hill, it is easy to imagine why it made such a superb defensive location.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at West Lodge gates - Dunecht House estate

(57.16252; -2.42870) <https://w3w.co/dozens.paint.hobby>

Start the walk outside the gates of the twin West Lodges for the Dunecht House estate*. Walk through the open gates and follow the narrow tarred road into the estate grounds.

**Note: The West Lodges for the Dunecht House estate are on the B977 road connecting Dunecht with Echt. They are approximately 1.5 km south of Dunecht, and 2.5 km north of Echt.*



(2) Veer left at y-junction

(57.15989; -2.42193) <https://w3w.co/themes.outfit.situation>

In just over 600 m, veer left at a y-junction. Follow this road, carrying straight on at an x-junction in about 250 m. After about 600 m, in total, you will arrive at gates for Dunecht House. (626 m)



(3) Left through pedestrian gate - then around field edge

(57.16164; -2.41450) <https://w3w.co/into.crackles.veal>

In 600 m, you will have arrived at a set of impressive gates for Dunecht House*. Turn left here and go through a pedestrian gate beside an ornamental turreted gate-house. After going through the gate, turn right and walk along the field edge, with the field on your left side and a wall on your right. (1.2 km)

**Note: Dunecht House is a category A listed mansion house set within some 1,700 acres of designed landscape. The extensive grounds, including gardens, woodland, parkland and lochs, are included on the prestigious Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes in Scotland. The barony of Echt had been in the hands of the Forbes family since 1469 and the original mansion house was built in 1705. The Grecian inspired replacement building was commissioned in 1820 by William Forbes, who employed the notable Aberdeen City Architect, John Smith, to undertake the design. In 1845 the property was bought by Lord Lindsay, later the 25th Earl of Crawford and the 8th Earl of Balcarres, with the proceeds of his family's wealth from Lancashire coal. By 1859 the house was extended by architect Smith's son. In the following decade a huge chapel and large library were both built in the then fashionable 'Lombardic' style.*



(4) Straight on - through golf course

(57.16123; -2.41177) <https://w3w.co/along.sunflower.fancy>

In just under 200 m, cross over the fence beside another gate-house and veer right, walking a short distance towards a road junction in front of another set of impressive Dunecht House gates. With the gates at your back, go straight on here, in a broadly easterly direction, through the golf course*. At first, the golf club buildings are below you, on your left. (1.4 km)

**Note: *Note: Please beware of flying golf balls on the golf course. Take care to observe golfing activity, standing back to allow golfers to play, unimpeded by your presence. Do not speak loudly if close to golfers playing their shots.*



(5) Right at x-roads

(57.16045; -2.40580) <https://w3w.co/stickler.fanfare.teams>

In 400 m, at a x-roads, turn right. (1.8 km)



(6) Right for Dunecht Policies loch

(57.15933; -2.40478)

<https://w3w.co/rankings.alongside.dinosaur>

In about 100 m, turn right onto a golf course path heading towards a dam embankment for the Dunecht House Policies Loch. Then, below the embankment, veer towards a stone-built edifice with a flow of water coming from an ornamental pipe, draining into a little pond and burn. Climb the rough stone steps to the top of the embankment, then turn left to start walking around the loch, following the grassy path as it bends right at the eastern end of the embankment and continues along the loch-side, now walking in a roughly south-westerly direction. (1.9 km)



(7) Left through trees to rough road - then right

(57.15630; -2.40773) <https://w3w.co/universal.richly.hilltop>

After walking around part of the loch for about 500 m, turn sharp left to follow a rough path into the trees. At the place where you turn, about 150 m away, on your right, at the end of the loch, you will see an old boat-house. In about 50 m from turning left through the trees, you will arrive at a rough estate road. Turn right here and follow the road towards the South Gatehouse exit from the Dunecht House estate grounds. (2.4 km)



(8) Turn right after passing through South Lodge gates

(57.15375; -2.41206) <https://w3w.co/stammer.ramps.crouching>

In 500 m from the lochside, leave the Dunecht House estate grounds at South Gatehouse entrance/exit. Immediately turn right and walk along the very quiet minor road for about 1.8 km. (2.9 km)



(9) Right along B977 road

(57.14653; -2.43469) <https://w3w.co/exclaim.keepers.bloodshot>

After 1.8 km on the minor road you will arrive at a t-junction with the B977 Dunecht-Echt road. Turn right here, walking on the right side of the road for about 100 m, facing oncoming traffic. TAKE EXTREME CARE here as the road is fairly busy (you may be able to walk up on the raised verge at least part of the way). (4.7 km)



(10) Left up rough road - signed Osprey

(57.14742; -2.43466) <https://w3w.co/appraised.litters.solids>

After walking along the B977 road for about 100m, go left to cross the road with care and walk up a rough access road. At the time of writing, a large red business sign with the word 'Osprey' is prominent at the road-end. Keep walking up this rough road, passing a house and business premises on your right side, then a house on your left side. Keep going until you reach a y-junction. (4.8 km)



(11) Right at y-junction

(57.14863; -2.45247) <https://w3w.co/carrots.fruits.knees>

In about 1.1 km, at a y-junction, go right for a short distance, looking for a field gate on your right side. (5.9 km)



(12) Right and uphill - through field gate

(57.14899; -2.45352) <https://w3w.co/elevator.relies.continues>
In about 75 m, turn right and uphill, through a field gate, to follow a rough road up the Barmekin Hill. (6.0 km)



(13) Left onto Barmekin summit path

(57.15047; -2.45222) <https://w3w.co/locating.orbited.doors>
In about 200 m, just before the rough road veers a little to the right, there is a small signpost with the word 'Path' pointing left and uphill. Go left here, then a little right as you negotiate your way through gorse bushes on a narrow path for the Barmekin summit. Don't take any apparent options going off left or right but keep climbing uphill, leaving the gorse bushes mostly behind you as the summit path becomes dominated by bracken and heather on either side. In about 350 m you will encounter the first of the 5 concentric earth/stone ramparts for the Barmekin Hillfort. Make your way through/over the gaps in the ramparts and head for the trig point on the summit. (6.2 km)



(14) Trig point at Barmekin summit

(57.15434; -2.45421) <https://w3w.co/duos.leave.gagging>
In 400 m from the path signpost you will have arrived at the trig point at the summit of the Barmekin Hill*. Once you have taken in the marvellous panoramic views, continue onwards, taking the path downhill on the northern side of the hill. Note that the path through the heather can be very muddy, and a little steep, in places. (6.6 km)

**Note: On the Barmekin of Echt hilltop there are the remains of what must have been a very impressive prehistoric hill-fort, comprising 5 huge concentric stone and earth ramparts surrounding the summit. The panoramic views from the top are extensive and, taking that alongside the steep and fairly uniform slopes of the hill, it is easy to imagine why it made such a superb defensive location.*



(15) Right along fence after Barmekin descent

(57.15792; -2.45289) <https://w3w.co/billiard.those.rafters>

After a descent of about 500 m, reaching a deer fence, go right along the path, keeping the fence close on your left side. Soon, you arrive at a gate. Go through the gate and carry on taking the rough road across the heathery hillside*. In about 300 m from the first gate you will arrive at another gate. Go through this gate following the rough road into a mostly broad-leaf woodland. (7.1 km)

**Note: the OS map notes that there is evidence of ancient hut circles and a cairn in this area, but the moorland terrain is so overgrown with heather that these ancient features are not readily evident to the passing eye.*



(16) Right at t-junction in wood

(57.16202; -2.45420) <https://w3w.co/forged.keyboard.initiates>

In 500 m from the last waypoint you will arrive at a (muddy!?) t-junction in the broad-leaf woodland. Go right here. In just over 600 m you will emerge from the woodland at Barmekin Cottage. Turn right before the cottage and take the rough access road back towards your walk start-point, eventually passing Old Wester Echt farm on your left side. Note: after the farm, on your left side, look out for the stone circle between Old Wester Echt farm and New Wester Echt farm (about 300 m away from you). (7.6 km)



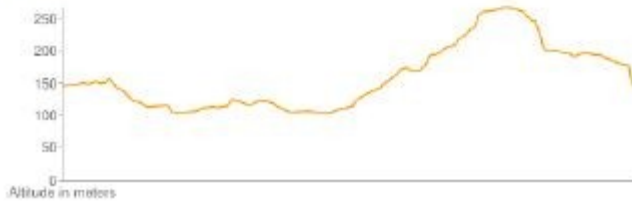
(17) Finish walk back at West Lodge gates

(57.16257; -2.42862) <https://w3w.co/dozens.paint.hobby>

In 1.7 km from Waypoint 16 you will arrive back at your walk start-point at the Dunecht House West Lodge gates (take care crossing the busy B977 road!). (9.3 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](#)