The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Kirkton of Bourtie-Hill of Barra Return (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

The focal point of this easy walk in fertile Garioch farming country is the exhilarating view from the summit of Barra Hill, redolent with the memories of historical drama over the ages. There is also an opportunity to visit the old country church-yard at Kirkton of Bourtie.

Duration: 1 hour.

Route Overview

Duration: 1 hour.
Transport/Parking: No public transport close to walk start/finish. There is a small car-park beside the Old Bourtie Church at the start/end of the walk.
Length: 2.310 km / 1.44 mi
Height Gain: 62 meter   **Height Loss:** 62 meter
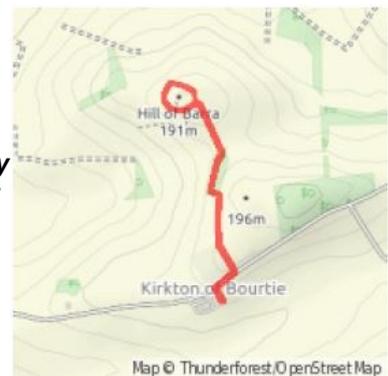**Max Height:** 186 meter   **Min Height:** 162 meter
Surface: Moderate. Good paths, field edges and fields. ***Note: you are likely to encounter farm livestock on this walk and access to the hill may not be advised during lambing season.***
Child Friendly: Yes, if children are used to walks of this distance and overall ascent.
Difficulty: Easy.
Dog Friendly: Yes, but note there are stiles to cross. Must be on lead on public roads and around any cattle or sheep encountered. ***Note: you are likely to encounter farm livestock on this walk and access to the hill may not be advised during lambing season.***
Refreshments: Options in Inverurie and Oldmeldrum.

Description

This is a short but very satisfying there and back walk to the summit of Barra Hill. Barra is a low hill with a marvellous view from the top of the Bennachie range to the south, and sweeping open views of the fertile Garioch farmland all around. The walk starts from the churchyard at Kirkton of Bourtie, between Inverurie and Oldmeldrum, making a gentle ascent through farmland and a small wood to the slopes of the hill. Stiles are conveniently placed in order to cross field boundaries as you make your ascent. Upon reaching the summit area you will immediately discern the impressive remains of three grass-covered levels of tiered earth and stone ramparts. Barra Hill is, in fact, a remarkable example of an Iron Age fort. Archaeological excavations have uncovered four prior phases of human activity: 1) early Prehistoric, 2) Neolithic to mid Iron Age, 3) late Prehistoric, 4) Pictish and Medieval. The slopes of the hill also show evidence of pre-modern rig and furrow farming practice. Historical accounts suggest that the Earl of Comyn's supporters camped on the hill-top in May 1308 before their bloody rout the next day at the hands of Robert the Bruce's kinsmen, during Bruce's savage military campaign to take over the kingship of Scotland. Bourtie Kirk, at the start/end of the walk has a long history. The present church building has an unusual pyramidal shape, and dates from 1806. Christian worship at this rural spot is believed to date back 800 years. The earliest gravestone discovered here is from the 16th Century.

Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Kirkton of Bourtie church

(57.31367; -2.32673)

Start the walk at Kirkton of Bourtie church* where there is a small area for parking cars. Walk up the steep access drive to the minor road and turn right. The road is quiet but please take all due care. Soon you will see an opening on your left signed "*Community Walk*".

Note: The present church building has an unusual pyramidal shape, and dates from 1806. Christian worship at this rural spot is believed to date back 800 years. The earliest gravestone discovered here is from the 16th Century.

(2) Left and up for Barra Hill path

(57.31480; -2.32590)

In about 175 m from the old church where you started the walk, turn left at a sign marked for "*Meldrum-Bourtie-Hill of Barra Community Walk*" go uphill. The short access drive for the nearby house soon gives way to a grassy track. Follow this track as it bends right to cross the top of two fields, with a stile in between the fields. Look out for the next stile, ahead of you. (174 m)

(3) Over second stile and down to left

(57.31769; -2.32696)

In 330 m, cross the second stile and follow the path downhill within the area of woodland. Keep following this path through the trees with a fence and a field on your left side. Look out for another stile ahead of you. (514 m)

(4) Over third stile and up field towards Barra Hill summit

(57.31926; -2.32675)

In just over 200 m, cross the third stile and walk uphill through the field towards the Barra Hill summit area. Look out for another stile ahead of you. (725 m)

(5) Over fourth stile and up to summit

(57.32099; -2.32823)

After just over 200 m, cross over the fourth stile. Take any route you like from here to the nearby summit of Barra Hill. We went left, initially, along the second line of prehistoric stone and earth ramparts, then made for the top just before the rocky area on the western side of the hill. (938 m)

(6) Summit of Barra Hill

(57.32161; -2.33059)

Looking south and west, on a clear day there are marvellous views of the Bennachie range and the Garioch countryside from the summit of Barra Hill. Whilst reaching the summit area you will discern the impressive remains of three grass-covered levels of tiered earth and stone ramparts. Barra Hill is, in fact, a remarkable example of an Iron Age fort [*see walk description and aerial photo below, and another aerial photo shown after last Waypoint description*]. When you are ready, walk back from the viewpoint in a clock-wise direction, heading around the top-most ridge of the summit plateau until you see the stile a little below, on the eastern side of the hill that you crossed during your ascent at Waypoint 5. Now re-trace your steps all the way back to the Kirkton of Bourtie church where you started the walk. (1.2 km)

(7) Finish back at Kirkton of Bourtie church
(57.31370; -2.32664)
In 1.1 km, having re-traced your steps back to the Kirkton of Bourtie church the walk is complete. (2.3 km)

Aerial Photo - Hill of Barra

Route Map

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Altitude in meters

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