

Walk 5: Dunnottar Woods

Distance: 4 km / 2 miles - allow 90 to 120 minutes

Difficulty: Moderate (one or two steep sections)



Dunnottar Woods is a deciduous woodland park on the south side of Stonehaven with two burns – Glasslaw and Carron – running through it. Undulating topography, a variety of trees, water features and historical sites make this a most attractive walk. It is a magnet for locals for dog walks and family time.

The woods were created around the same time as Dunnottar House, built in c.1806. The house was sadly demolished in 1959 after it was left dilapidated after WW2.

The walk is circular and can be done in either direction as you can walk from the town or there are car parking facilities at the southern end of the woods. (For an easy walk use the car park and do a short loop)

Starting from the car park walk down the main, wide track down and

through the gate. Follow this for a short way then turn right at the fork towards a footbridge and you will see Lady Kennedy's Bath in front of you. This is an oval shaped stone structure, diverting the Glasslaw Burn to create a pool. The (now missing) sluices would have controlled the water to create a pool for bathing. It is probable that it was built for the Kennedy family's children's enjoyment however, Lady Eleanor Kennedy also swam here each summer.



Cross the bridge and follow the path up and to the left. Walking along the edge of the woods here you can see the conical roof of a water reservoir across the field. Heading down now, to the left the Glasslaw Burn runs through a small gorge creating a pleasant waterfall scene in what is locally known as Periwinkle Den. There is a bridge here where you can look over the gorge. Head back to this bridge and cross over.



Turn to the right, wandering along a very pleasant woodland path keeping the burn to your right. You will pass a steep mound to your left which we will return to later on the loop back. Continuing forwards you will encounter a small road. Cross here and follow the path down to the right. Along this path keep an eye open along the way and you may see the doors to some fairy houses!



Walk on and you will come across a small depression with a folly known as the Shell Hoosie. This small summer house, shaped like a beehive, may have been built as a grotto for the amusement of the Kennedy children. Be sure to take a peek inside to see the restored interior of the seashell encrusted walls. The brickwork and sea shells were restored in 1999.



Once you have finished exploring this fascinating relic of the early nineteenth century, continue on up the path towards the high imposing walls of the Dunnottar Nurseries – the site of the former gardens for Dunnottar House. Follow the path around the walls and you here have the choice to completely circle the walls and head back or continue on to do a circuit around the Chapel Park, a wide meadow area surrounded by trees. It is thought to have taken its name for a now vanished Chapel of St. Ninian that stood here in medieval times. At the far north end you can cut down and head to the town via Low Wood Road or continue around and back to the Dunnottar walled gardens.

Pass the gardens then cross over the road, through the gate and follow the path then on the left ascend up to Gallows Hill. This hill was probably an early bronze age cairn dating from around 2000BC and is listed as a scheduled monument by Historic Scotland. Its history became more gruesome in the 1600s as it was made the place of execution for local criminals. Hence its modern name of Gallows Hill. A little way beyond the top of the hill is a grill which covers the entrance to the Ice House for Dunnottar House, where perishable food such as game was kept.



Head back down the side of the hill, go left and follow the path along the edge of the wood. An open field on your right is the site of the former Dunnottar House – there is an information board for your perusal.

Continue along this path and you will find yourself back in the main part of the southern woods with it's vast array of tree types. The Glasslaw Burn will now be to your left and you pass Lady Kennedy's Bath again as you head up towards the car park.

