

# The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

## Ballater Bridges-Knock Castle Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

### Route Summary

A little longer than our normal limit of 10 km, the overall ascent of 180 m is barely noticeable, making for an essentially gentle stroll in the scenic Dee Valley near Ballater. The diversion to Knock Castle is rewarded by great views and an interesting old story.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



### Route Overview

**Duration:** 3.5 hours.

**Transport/Parking:** Fairly frequent Stagecoach bus services along Deeside, from Aberdeen. Check timetables. There is a free car-park at Church Square in Ballater.

**Length:** 10.730 km / 6.71 mi

**Height Gain:** 183 meter. **Height Loss:** 183 meter.

**Max Height:** 260 meter. **Min Height:** 200 meter.

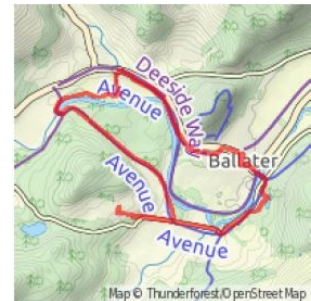
**Surface:** Moderate. Mostly good, well maintained paths and tracks. Some walking on tarred roads. A stile must be crossed to reach the castle. Probably not suitable for an off-road mobility scooter. See Waypoint 13 for more information.

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

**Difficulty:** Medium.

**Dog Friendly:** Yes, on lead on public roads and near farm animals. You may well encounter livestock in the field near Knock Castle.

**Refreshments:** Various options in Ballater.



### Description

This is a very scenic walk in the upper Dee Valley, taking in the wonderful countryside views on the west side of the village of Ballater. The route takes a shortened version of the traditional "Seven Bridges" walk from the village, crossing the River Muick close to where it meets the River Dee, rather than further upstream at Mill of Sterin, with a diversion to visit the impressive remains of Knock Castle.

The 7 bridges crossed are: (1) Ballater ("Royal" or "Queen's") Bridge over the Dee; (2) Brackley Burn Bridge; (3) River Muick Bridge; (4) Polhollick Bridge over the Dee;

(5) River Gairn footbridge; (6) the "Postie's Leap" footbridge over an unnamed burn, opposite "Polvier", the late Queen Mother's fishing lodge on the Dee; (7) an intended railway bridge on Bridge Street in Ballater (the line was never built). At an early point on the route we visit the Mackenzie Monument, overlooking Ballater. The monument commemorates Sir Allan Russell MacKenzie, who was the 2nd Baronet of Glen Muick and died in 1906. The information board there provides background to his family's purchase of the Muick Estate and their relationship with the royal presence at nearby Balmoral. The diversion to Knock Castle is well worth the extra effort. The ruin of Knock Castle is a peaceful and very scenic spot overlooking the upper Dee Valley. However, the 4-storey tower house wasn't always a tranquil place. It is said that one day, around the turn of the 16th C, Alexander Gordon, the 3rd Laird of Knock, sent his seven sons out to cut peat for the winter. Apparently, the brothers may have strayed onto the land of their Forbes neighbours, with whom they had a blood feud. A violent battle resulted in all the brothers being killed and their severed heads were impaled on their peat spades. Upon hearing the news, Alexander Gordon collapsed at the top of the Castle's spiral stair and tumbled to his death! Another particularly scenic highlight on our route is the white painted iron B-listed Polhollick Suspension Footbridge, which was built in 1892 and extensively damaged during Storm Frank in 2015 but is now repaired and re-opened.



## Waypoints

### (1) Start walk at main car-park in Ballater centre

(57.04832; -3.04083)

We suggest starting this walk from the main public car-park in the centre of Ballater, on Church Square. From there, walk a short distance onto Bridge Street (where most of the shops and cafes are). Turn right to follow Bridge Street towards the River Dee, then cross Ballater's Royal Bridge, opened by Queen Victoria in 1885.



### (2) After crossing the Royal Bridge - cross road and take path uphill

(57.04652; -3.03497)

In just under 500 m, having walked over the Royal Bridge, cross the busy t-junction with extreme care to take a rough, steep path uphill on your right through the trees. Alternatively, you can take the surfaced path to your left, signposted for Bridge of Muick, which takes a gentler and slightly more circuitous route to the same point. (477 m)



### (3) Mackenzie Monument

(57.04493; -3.03600)

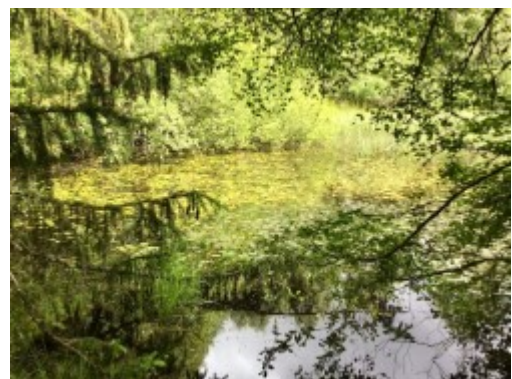
Having now joined the waymarked and surfaced path, in 200 m, or so, you will arrive at the substantial Mackenzie Monument\* (and information board). When you are ready, re-join the surfaced path and carry on. (667 m)

*\*Note: the monument commemorates Sir Allan Russell MacKenzie, who was the 2nd Baronet of Glen Muick. He was born on 29th March 1850 and died at the age of 56 in 1906. The information board provides background to the family's purchase of the Muick Estate, their relationship with Ballater in general, and the royal presence at nearby Balmoral, in particular. See: <http://www.deesidewalks.com/2012/04/monument-to-sir-allan-russell-mackenzie.html>*

### (4) Pond

(57.04405; -3.03435)

In about 140 m, we suggest a very minor diversion off the path (go straight ahead onto a narrow path at a bend on the main path) to check out a peaceful and pretty little pond. When you are ready, return to main path and carry on. (807 m)



## (5) Continue downhill at x-roads

(57.04256; -3.03723)

In about 300 m from the pond, the path crosses a tarred access road. Carry on downhill on the path through the trees. (1.1 km)



## (6) Left onto new path

(57.04215; -3.03968)

In 200 m, before the track reaches the B976 South Deeside Road, veer left to join the new surfaced path that avoids walking on the verge of the road. When this new path meets the grounds of a house you are obliged to walk on the verge of the B976 for a short section, passing the house and crossing a bridge over the Brackley Burn. Soon after the bridge, the path (on your left) re-starts for a short section. We advise that you re-join the path at that point rather than continue walking along the road verge. (1.3 km)



## (7) Take road over Bridge of Muick

(57.03960; -3.04537)

After 400 m from Waypoint 6, the path returns to the road at a junction where there is a memorial stone erected by Sir Allan Russell MacKenzie (see Waypoint 3) commemorating a chance meeting of Queen Victoria with the 1st Battalion Gordon Highlanders, who, soon after, suffered severe casualties in the Boer War. From here, veer right to follow the main B976 road over the Bridge of Muick. Walk along the verge of the road for about 1.2 km, passing the entrance to Dalhefour Woods (that you will return to later). (1.7 km)



## (8) At corner - veer right and uphill into trees

(57.04176; -3.06325)

After walking along the verge of the B976 road for about 1.2 km, veer right at a left-swinging corner, to take an indistinct track uphill into the pine trees. Follow the path until it meets a rough farm access road where you turn right to continue uphill. (2.9 km)





## (9) Cross stile to access path to Knock Castle

(57.04225; -3.06970)

After 400 m, go right to cross the stile that gives access to a path through a field taking you to Knock Castle. Please note that there may be livestock in the field. If you have a dog with you, ensure it is on lead. (3.3 km)



## (10) Knock Castle

(57.04301; -3.06923)

In 100 m, after passing through (and securing) a field gate, you will have arrived at the substantial ruin of Knock Castle\* where there are a couple of information boards. After checking out the castle and the views, re-trace your steps back to the B976 road, heading back along the verge of the road in the direction of Ballater, looking out for the Dalhefour Woods access road on your left. (3.4 km)

*\*Note: The ruin of Knock Castle is a peaceful and very scenic spot overlooking the upper Dee Valley. However, the 4-storey tower house wasn't always a tranquil place. It is said that one day, around the turn of the 16th C, Alexander Gordon, the 3rd Laird of Knock, sent his seven sons out to cut peat for the winter.*

*Apparently, the brothers may have strayed onto the land of their Forbes neighbours, with whom they had a blood feud. A violent battle resulted in all the brothers being killed and their severed heads were impaled on their peat spades. Upon hearing the news, Alexander Gordon collapsed at the top of the Castle's spiral stair and tumbled to his death!*



## (11) Left onto rough road through Dalhefour Woods

(57.04121; -3.05637)

In 900 m from Knock Castle, walking along the verge of the B976 road in the direction of Ballater, turn left when you meet a rough access road for Dalhefour Woods (known as "The Avenue"). You will soon pass through a gate (probably open). Initially, the road has open views on the left and is close to the River Dee on the right (you may deviate for a view of the river, but beware a steep and unstable riverbank). Eventually the road is surrounded by an open pine wood on both sides. Keep going for 2.4 km. Towards the end of this section, the white metal frame of Polhollick Bridge comes into view on your right. (4.3 km)



## (12) Right to cross Polhollick Bridge

(57.05468; -3.08235)

In 2.4 km from the turn-off on the B976 road you will have arrived at the attractive, white-painted Polhollick Footbridge\*, over the River Dee. Cross the bridge at this scenic spot and turn right. (6.7 km)

*\*Note: The B-listed Polhollick Suspension Footbridge was extensively damaged during Storm Frank in 2015 but is now repaired and re-opened. Like the similar bridge at Cambus O'May, this bridge was built by the firm of James Abernethy and Co, in 1892.*



## (13) Veer right for path through woods

(57.05617; -3.08330)

In 200 m, after crossing Polhollick Bridge and turning right, veer right off the access road to go through a pedestrian gate into woodland on the north bank of the River Dee\*. Note the evidence of flooding. Follow the path, slightly indistinct at times, as it goes back in the direction of Ballater, parallel to the river. After crossing a stepping stone on an un-named small burn and passing a large field on your left, the path turns left (north), away from the bank of the River Dee, to follow the banks of the River Gairn, now on your right side. (6.9 km)

*\*Note: unfortunately, this section, to Waypoint 14, is probably unsuitable for an off-road mobility scooter. In about 500 m, large, boulder-like stepping stones would impede crossing the small but steep-sided burn, where the path is also narrow and twisty. An alternative "High" path to Waypoint 15 also presents difficulties. This route continues along the access road to the A93 road where it crosses the road to follow a "High" path above the busy road. Unfortunately, where this path meets, and crosses the A939 Tomintoul road, the descent and ascent are roughly "stepped". It is possible to take the A93 road instead of the "High" path, but this involves 1 km on a busy A road.*



## (14) Cross wooden bridge then left to go around farm

(57.05982; -3.06992)

After 1.2 km, cross the wooden footbridge over the River Gairn and immediately turn left to walk around a set of farm buildings, following an access road up towards a junction with the A93 Braemar Road. (8.1 km)



### (15) Right and down for path after farm

(57.06016; -3.06852)

In just over 100 m, before the junction with the A93 road, veer right to go through a gate onto a footpath that heads into the (mostly) oak woodlands on the flanks of Craigendarroch Hill on the outskirts of Ballater. Soon the path descends to join the track of an intended (but never opened) Braemar extension to the Deeside railway line. The route passes close to (but high above) the River Dee\* before emerging at the outskirts of Ballater. Keep going, avoiding any junctions to right and left as you head back towards the centre of Ballater. (8.2 km)

*\*Note: during this section, the route crosses over the "Postie's Leap" footbridge over an unnamed burn, opposite "Polvier", the late Queen Mother's fishing lodge on the Dee. There is a local story that a postman leapt to his death here after being unlucky in love, but if this is true, no details appear to have survived.*



### (16) Left onto Invercauld Road

(57.04967; -3.04664)

After 1.9 km, you will arrive at a t-junction with Invercauld Road. Turn left here to soon arrive at a junction with the main A93 Road. Turn right there to walk into the centre of Ballater, passing the attractive, and recently rebuilt and refurbished, Old Ballater Railway Station buildings on your left as you arrive back at Bridge Street. (10.1 km)



### (17) After passing old railway station return to start point in car-park

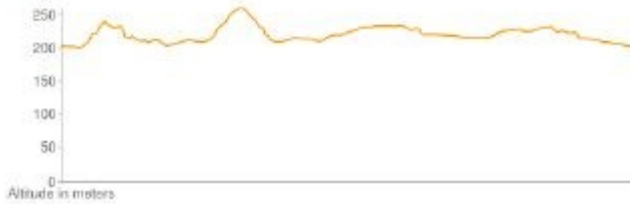
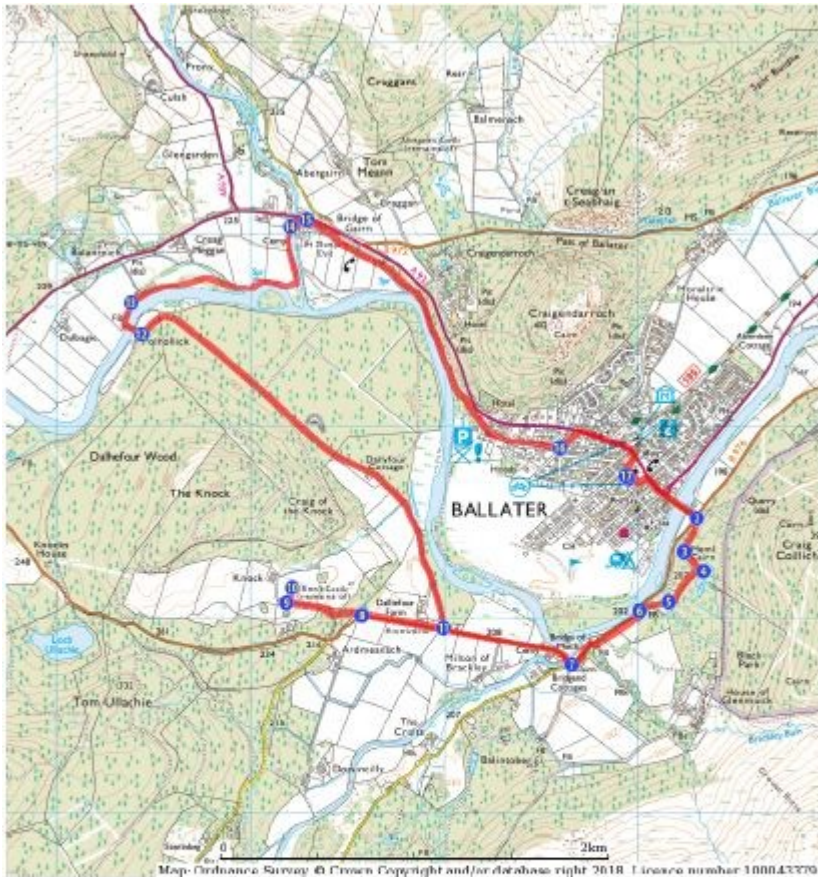
(57.04843; -3.04103)

In 600 m, you will arrive back at the car-park on Church Square where you started the walk. (10.7 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](#)