

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Ballater-Craigendarroch Hill-River Dee Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

A shorter version of this walk is a popular challenge for visitors to Ballater on account of the steepness of the ascent and the fine views over Deeside that are achieved. Although safe, the Pass of Ballater section on this extended version of the walk may not suit everyone.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



Route Overview

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

Length: 7.630 km / 4.77 mi

Height Gain: 261 meter. **Height Loss:** 261 meter.

Max Height: 392 meter. **Min Height:** 199 meter.

Surface: Moderate. Mostly on good paths. The Pass of Ballater section between Waypoints 4 and 5 is narrow with steep drops in places. Although safe, it may not suit all walkers. You may avoid this section by making a direct approach to the summit at Waypoint 4. Steep inclines and rocky surfaces in some sections.

Difficulty: Medium/Hard.

Child Friendly: In our view, not suitable for young children. See comments above regarding Pass of Ballater section.

Dog Friendly: Yes, but keep dogs on lead on public roads.

Refreshments: Various options in Ballater.



Description

The short but steep walk to the top of Craigendarroch Hill, overlooking the busy Deeside village of Ballater, is a classic leg-stretcher for locals and visitors alike, rewarded by excellent views of the Dee Valley and hilltops, near and far. This version of the walk makes a more gradual approach, going around the north side of the hill before approaching the summit from the east. All the same, the final section is still tough going! The second half of the route is a total contrast – to compensate for the previous exertions, a largely flat but satisfying stroll along the banks of the River Dee, bordering the scenic parkland golf course. The first section of the walk, after leaving the village, makes an ascent through the ancient oak woodland that gives the hill its name (*Craigendarroch* means “Hill of the Oaks” in Gaelic). In previous times some of the oaks were coppiced to produce strong, straight stems for purposes like the spokes of cartwheels. As the route progresses, the woodland environment changes to birch trees, and then to pines. Eventually the path winds around to the north side of Craigendarroch Hill, overlooking the Pass of Ballater, and looking across the Pass to the cliffs on the face of Craig an t’Seabhaig which are popular with rock climbers. The path is narrow here, and although quite safe, is slightly vertiginous in places. The chasm between the two hills was created by a glacier slicing through a fault in the rock during the last Ice Age. After a steep final ascent you will arrive at the summit of Craigendarroch where there is a built cairn with a metal top-plate with information on some visible hilltops. Descending a little from the summit there is a much bigger cairn of loose stones, an information board, and a better view to Ballater village and beyond. Returning to the village, a short section of the route then follows the intended line of the planned railway line from Ballater to Braemar, in order to reach the banks of the Dee for the riverside return section. Apparently, Queen Victoria objected to the route of the railway line passing Balmoral Castle, and construction was halted!



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Church Square

(57.04829; -3.04102) <https://w3w.co/headrest.darker.tuned>

The walk starts at the Church Square car-park. From there, walk a short distance to the main shopping street running through the village, Bridge Street. Go left up Bridge Street, soon passing the old railway station (now a visitor centre, and more) in Station Square on your right. Keep going, as Bridge Street bends a little to the left and becomes Braemar Road (A93).



(2) Right up Craigendarroch Walk

(57.05069; -3.04701) <https://w3w.co/tabloid.ringers.contacts>

In about 600 m, cross Braemar road and go right into the street called Craigendarroch Walk. In about 80 m, at a waymark post (see *pic, below*), take the path that veers left off the pavement and through a pedestrian gate towards the woodland at the base of Craigendarroch Hill (there is a waymark information sign but it is now unreadable). (592 m)



(3) Go left at paths y-junction

(57.05215; -3.04677) <https://w3w.co/fizzle.waltz.breakfast>

In 170 m from Braemar Road, now on a woodland path, go sharp left at a waymark post to take the path going gently uphill in a W, then NW, direction. There are a number of 'pop-out' information boards to look out for on the path. (760 m)



(4) Carry straight on - passing steep path on right

(57.05301; -3.05289) <https://w3w.co/rejoin.snapping.hologram>
In 440 m, at a waymark post, carry on, passing the steep path on your right which directly ascends to the summit of Craigendarroch. Keep following this path as it continues to gently ascend, soon passing the Craigendarroch Hotel below you. Eventually the path winds around to the north side of Craigendarroch Hill, overlooking the Pass of Ballater, and looking across the Pass to the cliffs on the face of Craig an t'Seabhaig which are popular with rock climbers. The path is narrow here, and although quite safe, is slightly vertiginous in places and may not suit everyone*. (1.2 km)

**Note: you may shorten the walk and avoid the Pass of Ballater section by, instead, turning right at this waypoint and making a direct approach to the summit, returning by the same route.*



(5) Take right fork uphill

(57.05877; -3.04318) <https://w3w.co/jogged.elaborate.clicker>
After 1.1 km you will arrive at a y-junction. Take the right fork, on a narrow path that initially zigzags uphill. After 120 m you will arrive at a waymark post. Follow the arrow to go left here, ignoring the steep path carrying on straight uphill (this is a shortcut to the summit path you will take after Waypoint 6). Follow the path as it goes around the eastern side of Craigendarroch with some views of the Dee Valley on the eastern approach to Ballater. (2.3 km)



(6) Right and uphill - for path to summit

(57.05723; -3.04361) <https://w3w.co/micro.meanings.blaring>
In 200 m, or so, where there is a broken bench and a waymark post for a path descending the hillside towards Ballater, go sharp right to take the path for the summit of Craigendarroch. Initially, the ascent through the trees is gentle, but soon becomes steep and rocky underfoot in places. (2.5 km)



(7) Summit of Craigendarroch

(57.05562; -3.04764) <https://w3w.co/fetching.plots.snores>
After a 500 m ascent you will arrive at small (built) cairn at the summit of Craigendarroch, with a metal top-plate with information on some visible hilltops. Descending a little from the summit there is a much bigger cairn of loose stones, an information board, and a better view to Ballater village. When you are ready, facing the info board, go right past the cairn to follow the path going SW off the hilltop (this is the very steep direct path to the summit from the W side of Craigendarroch that you passed the start of at Waypoint 4). (3.0 km)



(8) Left to re-trace steps back to Ballater

(57.05301; -3.05297) <https://w3w.co/rejoin.snapping.hologram>

In 600 m, after a steep descent from the summit, you will arrive at the paths junction and waymark post that you passed earlier in the walk at Waypoint 4. Go left here to re-trace your steps back to the street called Craigendarroch Walk, then left onto Braemar Road for a short distance, crossing over the road at the Auld Kirk B&B. (3.6 km)



(9) Right down Invercauld Road

(57.05044; -3.04540) <https://w3w.co/months.spirit.originals>

In 700 m, cross Braemar Road at the Auld Kirk B&B to go right down Invercauld Road. After 120 m, turn right onto Dundarroch Road (which is a dead-end for vehicles). At the end of Dundarroch Road, continue walking along the grassy lane which soon meets the junction of Braemar Place and Old Line Road*. Carry on along Old Line Road. (4.3 km)

**Note: part of the track of an intended (but never opened) Braemar extension to the old Deeside railway line. Apparently Queen Victoria objected to the planned route passing Balmoral Castle.*



(10) Veer left for car-park and riverside path

(57.05092; -3.05356) <https://w3w.co/cheat.straddled.reap>

In 500 m from Waypoint 9 on Invercauld Road, at a y-junction, take the left fork winding gently down towards a car-park and picnic spot on the banks of the River Dee. Turn left upon arriving at the riverbank and follow the riverside path back towards Ballater, with the golf course soon on your left side. Keep taking the riverside path for 2.1 km, until you arrive at Ballater Caravan and Camping Park. (4.8 km)



(11) Through opening to caravan park

(57.04383; -3.04025) <https://w3w.co/timeless.firm.professed>

After 2.1 km on the riverside path, go through an opening in the fence ahead of you to enter Ballater Caravan and Camping Park. Follow the internal road straight ahead of you through the Park, then carry straight on to join a riverside path with Ballater Bridge dominating the view in front of you. Arriving at the bridge, go left up, then down, stone steps. Follow the short access road up to Bridge Street and walk along the Street, away from the river and back into the centre of Ballater where you go left to return to your start point at Church Square. (6.9 km)



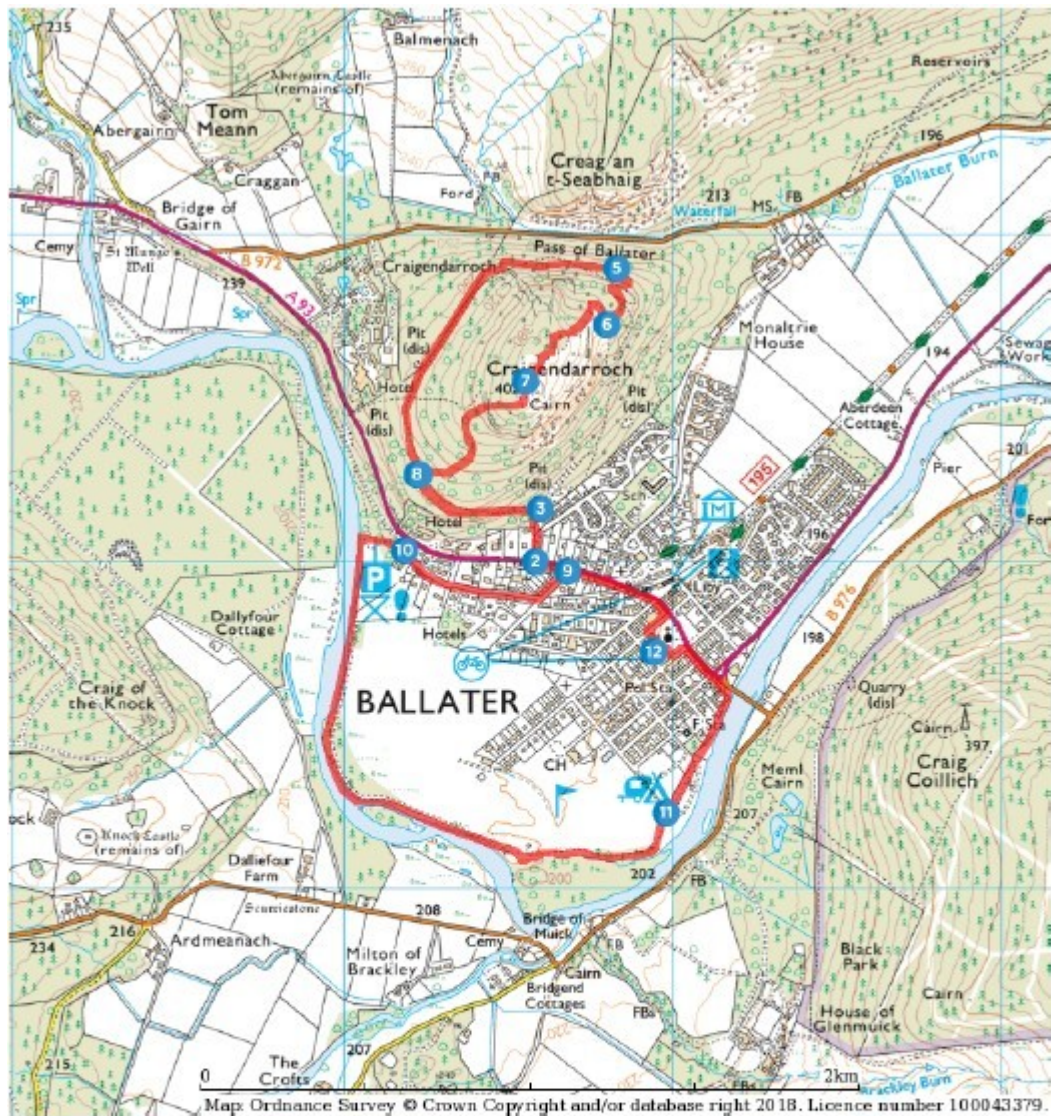
(12) Finish walk back at Church Square

(57.04825; -3.04099) <https://w3w.co/headrest.darker.tuned>

In 700 m from the point where you entered the Caravan Park, you will have returned to your start point at Church Square. (7.6 km)



Route Map



Links:

[Photos from walk](#)

[Download Route Guide](#) (PDF with illustrated Waypoints)

[Download GPX file](#) (GPS Exchange Format)

[Access Walk on Viewranger](#)

[Access Walk on Wikiloc](#)