

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Bennachie-Heather Brig-Mither Tap-Turnpike Road (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This is a great hill and forest walk at the tougher end of our range, at just over 9 km and with almost 400 m overall ascent. Despite its modest height, the Mither Tap rewards the walker with stunning panoramic views. The history of the place is also fascinating and diverse.

Duration: 4 hours



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: No bus service to the Bennachie Visitor Centre. No bus service to the Bennachie Visitor Centre. The Bennachie Visitor Centre is about 2 miles south of the Chapel of Garioch, off the road for Blairdaff. There is a Forestry Commission car-park. Charges apply.

Length: 9.050 km / 5.66 mi

Height Gain: 373meter **Height Loss:** 373 meter

Max Height: 489 meter **Min Height:** 148 meter

Surface: Rough in places. Mostly good paths. The path that ascends to the Mither Tap is in good condition but there are numerous high stone steps.

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

Difficulty: Hard

Dog Friendly: Yes. Ensure on lead in car-park area.

Refreshments: Small cafe and shop in the Bennachie Visitor Centre.



Description

This circular walk takes an unconventional approach to Bennachie's Mither Tap, walking around the hillside to ascend from the steeply sloped southern side and then makes a return by a more gentle route down the Maiden Causeway path, and along the Old Turnpike Road. On the way, mature coniferous forest gives way to majestic moorland expanses, then to mixed woodland. At the Mither Tap summit, and on both the ascent and descent, the views are breath-taking. Though not particularly high, the Bennachie range is very prominent, owing to the relative flatness of the surrounding terrain, and dominates the skyline from many viewpoints around Aberdeenshire. Although not quite the highest peak, the Mither Tap stands out due to the profile of the hill, which is shaped like a female breast. This may be reflected in the name "Mither Tap" (Mother Top) and "Bennachie" (Beinn na Ciche: 'hill of the breast')? The hill may have had a religious significance in prehistoric times, perhaps related to fertility, and is also the subject of much local legend, poetry and song. On this walk, the descent from the summit goes through an entrance corridor in what was clearly a massive but now ruined wall, taken to be the remains of an Iron Age and/or Pictish Hill Fort (perhaps 500 BC – 500 AD). From the early to mid 19th C common land on the east side of Bennachie was home to a small community of crofters known as the Colony who also provided skilled labour in agricultural trades such as dyking and ditching. Local landowners obtained legal backing for the appropriation of this "free land", and after 1859 the Colony disintegrated, broken up by landlord intimidation, eviction, and resultant poverty. There is a lot to learn about Bennachie, and this link to an A-Z index of information is an invaluable aid to the curious Rambler:

<http://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/discover-bennachie/>



Waypoints

(1) Start walk outside Bennachie Visitor Centre

(57.28453; -2.50225) <https://w3w.co/campus.deeper.swimsuits>

The walk starts outside the Bennachie Visitor Centre. Looking at the large information board, turn to your left and take the path marked for the Gordon Way. Soon, the path has a stone dyke and the Clachie Burn on your left as you head away from the Centre in a westerly direction.



(2) Carry on taking Gordon Way route

(57.28474; -2.50794) <https://w3w.co/sheet.dividers.gasping>

In just over 400 m from the Visitor Centre, at a paths junction, passing a small lochan in a clearing on your left, carry on taking the Gordon Way route ahead of you. (407 m)



(3) Keep on Gordon Way

(57.28546; -2.51119) <https://w3w.co/minimums.clever.workshop>

In another 250 m, at another paths junction, carry on taking the signed route for the Gordon Way. Continue on this path for about 1 km, ignoring any other paths going off to right or left. (651 m)



(4) Cross forest road and veer right along Gordon Way

(57.28239; -2.52580) <https://w3w.co/flows.homes.upsetting>

In approximately 1 km, as the path meets a forest road, cross the road and veer slightly right to continue taking the signed route for the Gordon Way. (1.6 km)



(5) Take right fork off Gordon Way for Mither Tap

(57.28037; -2.53347) <https://w3w.co/wharfs.nightcap.wordplay>
In 600 m, arriving at a cleared area of forest where paths and roads meet called the Heather Brig, take the right fork signposted Heather Brig-Mither Tap. Note that you are leaving the Gordon Way route at this point. Your path uphill for the Mither Tap is well made but is a fairly steep climb with many stone steps. (2.2 km)



(6) Right up steep narrow path

(57.28986; -2.52993) <https://w3w.co/blank.cartoons.workroom>
After 1.1 km ascent, approaching the summit tor of the Mither Tap, at a signpost, take the narrow path to your right which becomes increasingly steep then circles around the eastern side of the Tap before making the final climb over smooth granite rock to the summit. Alternatively, for a slightly longer and easier route to the top, follow the signed main path around the western and northern side of the hill. (3.3 km)



(7) Mither Tap

(57.29076; -2.52874) <https://w3w.co/retire.feasted.regrowth>
The summit of the Mither Tap provides superb views in all directions, aided by a viewfinder. Look out for the inscribed flat stone at your feet close to the trig point on the east side. This is known as the Thieves' Mark*, commemorating the victory by Bennachie landlords over the Bennachie Colonists. When you are ready to move on, take the route on the east side, heading north towards the gap in the wall of the old Pictish fort below you. Take the path through the gap towards the prominent signpost. (3.5 km)

**Note: '...The lairds' victory is commemorated in the "Thieves Mark" on the bedrock on top of Mither Tap – "B" stands for Balquhain, "P" for Pittodrie and "LE" for Logie Elphinstone and the date 1858 although Court of Session approval was not given until 1859 ...' See: <http://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/discover-bennachie/>*



(8) Left for Rowantree Car-park at signpost

(57.29160; -2.52731) <https://w3w.co/narrating.petted.lends>

In about 100 m from the summit of the Mither Tap, Having descended through the gap in the wall of the old Pictish fort, take the path downhill to the left of the signpost, heading for the Rowantree Car-park. Note that for some strange reason, the Rowantree path is not named on the side of the signs you are looking at! Parts of this main access path down from the hill-top are known as the Maiden's Causeway*. (3.6 km)



**Note: '...The path from Rowan Tree Car Park to Mither Tap closely follows the line of an ancient roadway called the Maiden Causeway ... It is possible that it is the same age as the fort on the Mither Tap summit and could have been constructed to facilitate carting the enormous quantities of stone required for the fort's construction. The legend of the Maiden Stone has the devil as its builder ...!' See: <http://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/discover-bennachie/> Another alternative view is that the road was built in the 19thC to take stone away from the old fort for building purposes.*

(9) Hosie's Well

(57.29797; -2.53069) <https://w3w.co/worksheet.slate.deny>

In 800 m from the signpost at Waypoint 8 there is an information board by an old spring/well, called Hosie's Well. It is a favoured picnic spot and is associated with a tale of lost love and tragic death linked to the Battle of Harlaw in 1411. Carry on down the path after checking out the info board and well. (4.4 km)



(10) Right along Old Turnpike Road

(57.30801; -2.51451) <https://w3w.co/sometimes.warned.property>

After a further 1.6 km descent, go right along the path for the Old Turnpike Road. Below this junction lie the remains of the Maiden Fort*, which you may wish to investigate. Also, about 800 m from here are the remains of a Bede House**, up a little track on your right a little, looking left. (6.0 km)

**Note: Maiden Castle/Fort: 'Close to the Rowan Tree Car Park, is a Pictish fort standing on a rocky outcrop surrounded by a ditch and a circle of mature trees. Excavations at the site have confirmed settlement in the area from 7,000 BC up to mediaeval times. During excavations in 2009 a rare Iron Age cobbled road, a stone pendant, and a 1,000-year-old sparkling glass bead were discovered. It would have provided early inhabitants with a panoramic view of the Garioch ... Maiden Castle was a very high-status residence, probably home to an ancient prince or king ... The excavation have now been filled in to preserve the site.'*



***Note: Bede House: '... Remains of building partly hidden under plantation trees known locally as the Bede House. A "Bede house" was a hostelry/hospital of medieval origin for displaced men built and served by a religious house or landowner. The Bennachie Bede House lies 500mts to the southwest of Pittodrie House (now a hotel) alongside a turnpike road at a junction with an older road that used to skirt Bennachie to the East and South.'*

See: <http://www.bailiesofbennachie.co.uk/discover-bennachie/>

(11) Veer right off tarred section to continue

(57.29128; -2.50398) <https://w3w.co/dunk.betrayed.puppy>
After 2.1 km, veer slightly right off a short tarred access road to a house, to continue taking the route of the Old Turnpike Road through trees. (8.1 km)



(12) Left down Discovery Trail to Visitor Centre

(57.28559; -2.50460) <https://w3w.co/latest.windmill.feared>
In 700 m, just after passing an inscribed stone with a drilled hole, go sharp left down a path marked for the Discovery Trail. (8.8 km)



(13) Right for Visitor Centre

(57.28611; -2.50416) <https://w3w.co/decisive.diverting.trailers>
In 30 m, or so, there is a junction where you go right, taking you through a children's 'discovery' area for wildlife on a path to the Bennachie Visitors Centre. (8.83 km)

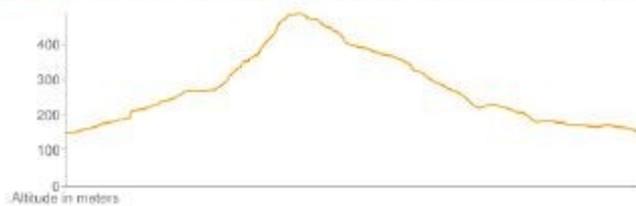


(14) Finish walk back at Visitor Centre

(57.28452; -2.50247) <https://w3w.co/campus.deeper.swimsuits>
In 70 m you will have returned to your start-point at the large information board outside the Bennachie Visitors Centre. (9.05 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](#)