

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Cairnbulg-Whitelinks Bay-St Combs Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This is a bracing walk along the windy coastline at the NE corner of Scotland passing through evocative old fishing villages and crossing the wonderful crescent-shaped beach at Whitelinks Bay.

Duration: 2.75 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Stagecoach 69 bus service from Fraserburgh. Check timetable. Free parking at walk start/finish, Cairnbulg Harbour.

Length: 8.170 km / 5.11 mi

Height Gain: 60 meter. **Height Loss:** 60 meter.

Max Height: 16 meter. **Min Height:** 0 meter.

Surface: Moderate. Mostly on paved surfaces. Some walking on good grassy tracks and a section of beach walking.

Difficulty: Easy.

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

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

Refreshments: Options in Fraserburgh.



Description

This is an enjoyable circuit along the airy coast between Cairnbulg and St Combs, on the “Knuckle of North East Scotland”, where the coastline turns west from the more exposed North Sea to the increasingly more sheltered Moray Firth. The combined villages of Cairnbulg and Inverallochy (the local Community Council is now called “Invercairn”) have a long association with the fishing industry, although as the nature of fishing operations changed, the locus moved to nearby Fraserburgh. The inadequate nature of the original fisher huts was cruelly exposed in the cholera epidemics of the 1860s and they were cleared to make way for planned settlements centred on Inverallochy and Cairnbulg and, a little further down the coast, at St Combs. This development supported the boom in the herring fisheries, and by the 1880s well over 200 fishing boats operated from these coastal villages. The new villages were set in neat rows, gable end to the sea to minimise the effect of stormy weather. The spaces between the houses were used to shelter the boats dragged up out of the water, and the communities shared the seashore washing lines still in place today. Nowadays the villages have expanded as dormitory satellites for Fraserburgh and the wider Buchan area. The walk starts and ends at West Haven harbour a little west of Cairnbulg. The harbour is no longer used commercially but as ‘Cairnbulg Boathaven’, it provides moorings for leisure craft. As our walking route progresses, the next point of interest is the eye-catching and evocative “Lost At Sea Memorial” representing a fisherman’s wife and child looking out to sea. Next, we arrive at “Maggie’s Hoosie”. This is a community-led project which has restored a traditional fisher’s cottage as a museum representing the life of the fisher-woman who lived there. Soon, the wide crescent-shaped beach backed by sand dunes at Whitelinks Bay opens up before you, with the Inverallochy golf links on the landward side. At the walk turning point in St Combs we visit the remains of the medieval church of St Columba, which was abandoned in 1608.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Cairnbulg harbour-marina

(57.68003; -1.94390) <https://w3w.co/radically.remix.woke>

Start the walk at Cairnbulg harbour-marina* which is just outside Cairnbulg on the western side. It is signposted as you enter the centre of the village. Walk in a SE direction back towards Cairnbulg, soon joining Shore Street. With the sea-front close on your left side, walk along the street, or on the grassy verge, where there are many poles and lines for drying washing.

**Note: Thanks to Ports and Harbours of the UK for this information: '[the harbour] is no longer used commercially. As 'Cairnbulg Boathaven', it is nowadays used by a number of leisure craft, with a present capacity in the region of twenty craft from 16' to 24'. This harbour is run by a committee of management and is a Scottish registered charity. It is presently undergoing a programme of development whereby grants and aid funding are being submitted. The recent addition of a pontoon system has provided an additional 20 berths.*

History

The idea of a harbour 'wast by' (to the West of Cairnbulg) was first conceived in the 1920s with land donated to the village by the then laird Sir John Duthie. Work on the pier commenced soon after but came to a halt when funds ran out after achieving only 80 metres of construction. The harbour remained untouched for the subsequent sixty years until the early 1980s when Andrew May took over Chairmanship of the harbour committee and pushed for progress. Upon receiving funding from the Scottish development agency work again continued with an extension to the existing East breakwater. Construction was aided by using World War 2 tank traps as building blocks. As work continued it became apparent that a west pier could be built, giving all year round moorings.' See: <http://www.ports.org.uk/port.asp?id=658>



(2) Lost At Sea Memorial

(57.67763; -1.93327) <https://w3w.co/budgeted.ticked.sunblock>

In just over 750 m you will arrive at the eye-catching and evocative Lost At Sea Memorial* representing a fisherman's wife and child looking out to sea. When you are ready, carry on along Shore Street. (762 m)

**Note: The sculpture by Beltane Studios in Peebles is a memorial to NE fishermen lost at sea. The funding for the memorial was organised by Invercairn Community Council which represents the linked villages of Cairnbulg and Inverallochy.*



(3) Right up Shore St for Maggie's Hoosie

(57.67717; -1.93018) <https://w3w.co/engraving.pats.sprinting>

In another 200 m, or so, go right off the sea-front road* to briefly divert to Maggie's Hoosie, a traditional fisher's cottage. (960 m)

**Note: the road to the right is actually a continuation of Shore Street. The road continuing along the sea-front is not named on the map.*



(4) Maggie's Hoosie

(57.67697; -1.92989) <https://w3w.co/polished.clinking.obtain>
In 30 m you will arrive at the picturesque Maggie's Hoosie*, with its white-washed walls and pantile roof. When you are ready, re-trace your steps to the sea-front road and carry on walking along the front, with the sea on your left side. (988 m)

**Note: Maggie's Hoosie is a community-led project which has restored a traditional fisher's cottage as a museum representing the life of the fisher-woman who lived there, and her parents and siblings before her. There are earthen floors, no electricity or running water. Information is provided on the preparing and baiting of fishing lines, curing, smoking, salting and drying fish. Check out opening times here: <https://www.visitabdn.com/listing/maggies-hoosie>*



(5) Left along Shore Street

(57.67578; -1.92744) <https://w3w.co/empires.aside.broadcast>
In 300 m the sea-front road re-joins Shore Street. Go left here, to continue along the sea-front. In about 80 m you will pass a large house with outbuildings on your left side. From this point the tarred sea-front road changes to a rough track. Continue along the track with the rocky sea-front on your left side and the Inverallochy golf course on your right side. Soon the track becomes a coastal path. (1.3 km)



(6) Walk along the beach at Whitelinks Bay

(57.67200; -1.91908) <https://w3w.co/salsa.tweezers.important>
In 700 m, depending on the state of the tide, the wide crescent-shaped beach backed by sand dunes at Whitelinks Bay opens up before you. Descend to the attractive but (typically) quiet beach at a convenient point and continue walking along the beach in a SSE direction towards the neighbouring village of St Combs, passing a partially sunken WWII pillbox at a mid-point. At the end of the beach, where there are rocks, continue walking on the sand with the low rocky shoreline now on your left side and the sand dunes with bent grass on your right side. (2.0 km)



(7) Veer right and onto beach road by huts

(57.66463; -1.91331) <https://w3w.co/redeeming.nags.belief>
After 900 m, leave the beach by veering right onto a sandy road by some metal huts. Walk through the dunes, away from the sea, along the rough road. (2.9 km)



(8) Left at golf course paths x-roads

(57.66304; -1.91333) <https://w3w.co/squad.robot.frostbite>

In 200 m, emerging onto the golf course*, go left** at a x-roads along a golf course path towards the Charleston area of the village of St Combs. Passing the 11th green on your right, and the 12th tee on your left take a grassy path that passes close to a house on your right side. This path soon emerges onto a tarred street in St Combs. (3.1 km)

**Note: On the golf course please quietly stand back and allow golfers to play their shots, and watch out for flying golf balls.*

***Note: As an alternative to turning left and walking towards the 11th green and 12th tee, especially if there are golfers there you may carry on taking the rough road that crosses the fairways for a short distance until it meets a narrow tarred public road. Turn left to enter St Combs along that road, picking up our route again at Waypoint 9.*



(9) Left into St Combs

(57.66020; -1.91169) <https://w3w.co/deploying.usages.galleries>

In 300 m, emerging, between houses, from the grassy path leading from the golf course, onto a tarred street, go left to follow the street. (3.4 km)



(10) Left into small car-park and down steps to beach

(57.66028; -1.91052) <https://w3w.co/scale.crunched.wiping>

In 100 m, or so, go left to cross a small car-park and then go down the steps to beach. Veer right at the foot of the steps to walk along St Combs beach. (3.5 km)



(11) Sharp right up sandy path

(57.65891; -1.90606) <https://w3w.co/dots.total.schematic>

In 400 m, turn sharp right to take a sandy path up onto the dunes backing the beach. At the top of the path, facing a house, turn sharp left, to take the narrow path going SE over the dunes, passing a stone bench. Look out for a path on your right about 50 m after the bench. (3.9 km)



(12) Right down path to rough road

(57.65873; -1.90648) <https://w3w.co/boldest.plastic.existence>
In 100 m from the beach, go right down a narrow path towards a rough road through the dunes. You can see a walled graveyard that you will soon visit on the route, on the beach-head ahead of you. When you have descended to the rough road, go left, walking away from the centre of St Combs in a SE direction. (4.0 km)



(13) Sharp right and up grassy road towards graveyard

(57.65783; -1.90581) <https://w3w.co/congested.amounting.minute>
In just over 100 m, go sharp right and up a grassy road back towards the graveyard and the centre of St Combs. At the top of the grassy road, where it meets Church Street, turn right at the corner of the graveyard wall. (4.1 km)



(14) Veer right and through gates into graveyard

(57.65837; -1.90753) <https://w3w.co/number.shuffle.crafts>
After more than 100 m, veer right and through the gates into the graveyard. Make your way to the obvious ruined wall close by. (4.2 km)



(15) Ruin of St Columba's Church

(57.65841; -1.90719) <https://w3w.co/mystified.alarming.dissolve>

In about 30 m, amongst gravestones from more recent centuries sits the remains of the medieval church of St Columba*. When you have checked out the ruin and surrounding gravestones, re-trace your steps out of the graveyard and turn right to walk down Church Street, which soon joins Mid Street, where you again go right and gently downhill. (4.3 km)

**Note: Thanks to Canmore for the following information: 'The medieval church of St Combs (St Columba) was abandoned in 1608 when a new church was built 2 miles further inland. It measures internally 62ft E-W by 15ft 3ins transversely, and part of the W gable survives to a height of about 10-12ft, pierced by a small square-headed window.' See: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/21121/st-combs-old-church>*



(16) Right along Gordon Street

(57.65975; -1.91018) <https://w3w.co/friday.surreal.dispensed>

In 300 m, turn right out of Mid Street onto Gordon Street. Follow Gordon Street through the lower part of St Combs village, passing earlier Waypoints 10 and 9. Follow the road round as it heads out of the village back in the direction of Inverallochy and Cairnbulg, with the golf course on your right side. Soon, the narrow minor road bends left and uphill to a y-junction where you veer right to continue on the tarred road back in the direction of Inverallochy. The golf course remains fairly close on your right side at all times as you pass a series of very large houses on your left. (4.6 km)

**Note: We understand that these homes were built by very successful local fishing families.*



(17) Cross Allochy Road and carry on taking footpath

(57.67376; -1.92699)

<https://w3w.co/decimals.luckier.package>

After 1.9 km, leave the narrow tarred road to join a short section of path. At the safety barriers cross Allochy Road, and carry on taking the path on the other side of the road. (6.5 km)



(18) Right down Rathen Road

(57.67495; -1.93151) <https://w3w.co/wakes.overture.rice>

After 300 m, the path meets Rathen Road on the boundary between Inverallochy and Cairnbulg. From here you turn right and may choose to follow our route along Station Road, Duthie Terrace and Church Street to cross a grassy area back to the walk starting point at Cairnbulg Harbour, or you may wish to descend more directly to the sea-front at Shore Street and re-trace your steps to the start from there. (6.8 km)



(19) Finish walk back at Cairnbulg harbour-marina

(57.68002; -1.94398) <https://w3w.co/radically.remix.woke>

In 1.4 km, or so, you will have arrived back at the walk start-point at Cairnbulg harbour/marina. (8.17 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](#)