

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Crovie-Gamrie-St John's Kirk Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This is a wonderfully scenic coastal walk with some steep ups and downs along the way. The route takes in two very picturesque and attractive former fishing villages and a wonderful viewpoint at the evocative ruin of St John's Kirk, overlooking Gamrie Bay.

Duration: 3 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: The Stagecoach #273 from Banff goes to Gardenstown. Our route could be re-arranged to start and end in Gardenstown. Check timetable. There is a small free car-park at the walk start/end point.

Length: 7.450 km / 4.66 mi

Height Gain: 189 meter. **Height Loss:** 189 meter.

Max Height: 111 meter. **Min Height:** 7 meter.

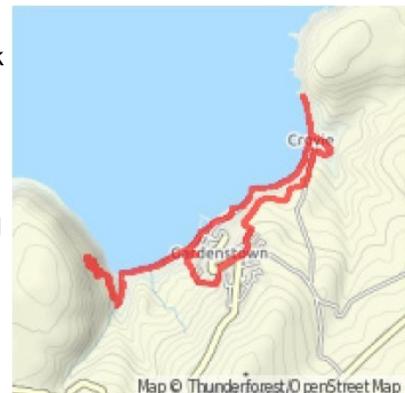
Surface: Moderate. Mostly good paths with some paved surfaces, and a section on a rough road. The access path to St John's Church is affected by landslip at the base, but is easily passable by an alternative rough path.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

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

Refreshments: The Garden Arms in Gardenstown, otherwise we suggest Macduff/Banff, or Fraserburgh.



Description

This is an exhilarating rollercoaster of a walk with a clutch of steep ascents and descents along one of the grandest and most picturesque coastlines in the NE of Scotland. Deep valleys (or "dens") break up the coastal landscape, with high cliff-tops punctuated by former fisher villages clinging to tiny strips of land, constantly threatened by the sea. The fertile farmland above is assisted by a relatively benign micro-climate, protected by the Grampian Mountains and the Moray Firth. The walk starts at the fine viewpoint above Crovie where there is a picnic area and an inscribed stone. A new cliff-top path to Gardenstown provides some stunning perspectives on the coastline. On a clear day you can see the northern tip of Scotland across the Moray Firth. Originally, and still familiarly, known as Gamrie, the pretty sea-town area of Gardenstown was founded in 1720 by the local landowner as a planned fishing village, to provide rental income. From the beach there, our route ascends to the eye-catching ruins of the Church of St John, built in 1513, on a spot occupied by monks to give thanks for a famous victory over an invading Danish army in 1004 (see *Waypoint 8 in the PDF for more information*). Returning to the village, we take a dramatic coastal path, in places cut into the rocky headland that separates Gardenstown and Crovie. Tiny and picturesque Crovie (pronounced "Crivie"), which has no vehicular traffic through the village, was established by crofters who had been displaced from the North of Scotland by the Highland Clearances. They made a hard and precarious living from fishing, paying the local laird rent for the boats and the cottages. By the end of the 19th C, more than 50 fishing boats were based here. The village was almost destroyed in the Great Storm of January 1953. Since then most of the buildings, which all have "listed" status, have become holiday or weekend homes.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Crovie Viewpoint

(57.67602; -2.32520) <https://w3w.co/finally.valued.took>

The walk starts from the Crovie Viewpoint, which is clearly marked on the left of the Crovie (pronounced 'Crivie') access road, about 1.7 km from the turn-off from the B9031 Macduff to New Aberdour road. This fine Viewpoint overlooks Crovie village and Gamrie Bay. From the viewpoint turn left and walk uphill, inland on the grassy bank for a few metres to almost immediately turn right to join the clifftop path to Gardenstown (also known as 'Gamrie'). In about 750 m, the path rises to meet the outskirts of the upper part of Gardenstown village. Go through the gate and turn right to walk along Morven* View Road.



**Note: the 'Morven' referred to in the street name is the conical-shaped hill of that name in Caithness, across the Moray Firth, some 90 km away. Not to be confused, of course, with the very differently shaped hill of that name in Deeside, in Aberdeenshire. If the conditions are clear you will clearly pick out its distinctive shape across the Firth.*

(2) Left and up Garden Crescent

(57.67165; -2.33255) <https://w3w.co/prices.wasps.raven>

After almost 900 m, turn left off Mormond View Road and go uphill on Garden Crescent, following the bend right as it heads down to the junction with Bracoden Road. Turn right and downhill here, as Bracoden Road soon becomes Gamrie Brae, the road that leads down to the harbour area of the village. (882 m)



(3) Left onto Fernie Brae

(57.66990; -2.33610) <https://w3w.co/punters.hotdog.chromatic>

In 300 m from Waypoint 2, leave the main Gamrie Brae road to go left onto the narrow Fernie Brae access road that soon starts to descend towards the Seatown area of Gardenstown. (1.2 km)



(4) Left down grassy path

(57.66933; -2.33932) <https://w3w.co/litigate.dusters.solving>
In 300 m, after some sheds on the left, near the end of the Fernie Brae Road as it bends right towards its terminus where there is a small play-park, veer left to take a grassy path downhill. The opening to the path is easily missed at the bend in the road. If you reach the play-park, you have gone too far! Follow the grassy path (unusually, you will notice, it has street lighting!) as it wynds its way downhill. At the end of the path, follow it as it passes between two houses to a t-junction with a surfaced path. Turn left here and walk a very short distance to the next waypoint at the Denside/Bankhead junction. (1.5 km)



(5) Left down Denside lane

(57.67084; -2.33914) <https://w3w.co/forgotten.garage.swells>
In 300 m, at the Denside/Bankhead junction, go left and downhill down the Denside lane. (1.8 km)



(6) Left along Seatown road

(57.67120; -2.34022) <https://w3w.co/alcove.uptake.glossed>
In 100 m, turn left along the sea-front road in the charming Seatown area of Gardenstown. You will notice that all the houses are gable-end to the sea, with wooden shutters for their windows, to combat the effects of high tides and stormy weather. Carry on walking along the sea-front road to the small car-parking area at the end. Follow the ramp there down onto the beach. Walk along the beach. There are some marvellous red rock formations to admire on your left side. About half way along the beach, you should have no difficulty crossing the Pishlium Burn (you may wish to deviate briefly up a muddy path on the burn-side to see an attractive waterfall). Carry on along the beach towards another burn running onto the sand nearer the end of the beach. (1.9 km)



(7) Left off beach onto path for St John's Church

(57.66949; -2.34894) <https://w3w.co/tens.dreaming.formation>
In 500 m, where the Kirk Burn runs out onto the beach, turn left and inland into the valley (den) of the burn. An early section of the made path on the west side of the burn has been destroyed by landslips here. We recommend taking the replacement rough path that follows the burn on the left (east) bank. Follow this narrow path, with the burn on your right, until you reach the end of the first bridge on the made path (you don't need to cross the bridge as you are already 'over' the burn). Turn left here to now follow the main path, soon crossing another bridge. Keep following the path as it ascends towards the ruin of St John's Kirk on the hillside, above. (2.4 km)



(8) The ruin of St John's Church and graveyard

(57.66930; -2.35205) <https://w3w.co/boards.pacifist.inclines>

In 600 m, you will have reached the entrance to the graveyard of the ruined St. John's Kirk*, at the top side, where there is a bench and an information board on the entrance gate pillar. Facing the bench, our walks goes right here to follow a loop of grassy path higher onto the hillside where there is another bench and even better views over Gamrie Bay and down to Gardenstown and Crovie, further along the coast. It is your choice whether you take this upper loop immediately, and investigate the graveyard and church ruin on your descent, or check out the churchyard (there are many interesting 18th C gravestones) first, then ascend up the hillside later. In any case, when you are ready to return to Gardenstown, re-trace your steps on the path down to the beach, walk along the beach and up the ramp onto the Seatown sea-front road. Carry on along this road until you come to the periphery of the harbour area. (3.0 km)



**Note: It is believed that the original St John's Kirk (church) was built in the 11thC, but the current ruin is thought to be mostly from the 1500's. The site is linked to the "Battle of the Bloody Pitts" fought here between Scots and Danes in the year 1004. The interesting, and bloody, story is recounted here: <https://bit.ly/3mY28s4> See also: <http://bit.ly/3trZKwe>*

(9) Veer left to walk along harbour side

(57.67224; -2.33862) <https://w3w.co/appointed.fools.split>

In 1.9 km, veer left off the Seatown road to continue walking east, with the harbour/marina now on your left side. There is a small fishing boat on display here, and a couple of interesting information boards. At the end of the harbour, as you pass the old 4-storey harbour store (now the Gardenstown Heritage Centre), go up the small flight of steps and go along nearby Harbour Street, with its brightly painted houses. At the end of Harbour Street, pass the old fishing boat in the little square at the start of the New Ground area of the village, used in past times by salmon net fishermen. Veer a little right here to follow the New Ground road between buildings and sheds to a car-parking area at the sea-front with a small area of decking. Keep going in an easterly direction through the car-park, away from the village centre, towards the base of the cliff where there is a small set of concrete steps. (4.9 km)



(10) Up steps and along coastal path to Crovie

(57.67425; -2.33303) <https://w3w.co/enjoyable.broth.grazes>

In 400 m, go up the steps, under the cliff, at the end of a brightly painted low wall in the car-parking area. Now walk along the stony upper shore* towards an obvious path, with chain fencing on the sea side. Follow this scenic coastal path, under the cliffs to Crovie village. (5.3 km)



**Note: if you arrive at high-water on a spring tide, this small area of stony beach at Gardenstown may be impassable. You have the option to wait, or return to Crovie by taking the cliff-top path between Crovie and Gardenstown that you took in the first part of this walk. See: <https://tides.willyweather.co.uk/gr/aberdeenshire/gardenstown.html>*

(11) Veer left for seafront path

(57.67771; -2.32483) <https://w3w.co/absent.reward.dish>

In 700 m, at the entrance to Crovie village, veer left to take the seafront path, with the gable ends of the attractive former fisher cottages on your right side, and passing many lines for drying washed clothes. Keep going past the little harbour pier to the very end of the village where you do an about-turn to re-trace your steps to the pier area. (6.0 km)



(12) Left and inland at harbour

(57.67923; -2.32401) <https://w3w.co/deputy.funky.radar>

In 800 m, after returning to the pier, just after crossing the wooden bridge over the little burn, veer left and inland, crossing another small bridge to pass two cottages on your left side and join a rough road up the side of the den (valley of the burn). Follow this rough road (used by emergency vehicle to access this end of the village) up to t-junction where you turn right to go briefly downhill, over a stone bridge, then up again to a small car-parking area at the side of the tarred public road for Crovie. Turn left and go up the steep hill to arrive back at the Crovie viewpoint where you started the walk. There are great views down towards Crovie to compensate for the short, but arduous, climb! (6.8 km)



(13) Climb Crovie brae and finish walk at viewpoint car-park

(57.67605; -2.32515) <https://w3w.co/finally.valued.took>

After 700 m from the centre of Crovie, at the pier, you will have arrived back at your walk start-point in the car-park of the Crovie Viewpoint. (7.5 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 Outdooractive](#)

[Access Walk on Wikiloc](#)