

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Deer Abbey-Pitfour Lake Ramble (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

A relatively easy walk with minimal overall ascent on good paths and estate roads. The route breaks into 3 main components – firstly, open outlooks from the old railway line; then the fascinating ruins of Deer Abbey; and finally, the picturesque beauty of Pitfour Lake.

Duration: 2.75 hours



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Stagecoach services to Mintlaw (e.g. #60, Aberdeen to Ellon, then #67/#68, Ellon to Mintlaw). Check timetables. It is approx. 1.6km to walk from the roundabout in Mintlaw to the walk start-point. Easy parking in the car-parking area at the small retail/commercial park at the start/end of the walk.

Length: 6.660 km / 4.16 mi

Height Gain: 100 meter

Height Loss: 100 meter

Max Height: 80 meter

Min Height: 39 meter

Surface: Smooth. Good paths and estate roads. Sections may be muddy after wet weather. There are 2 sections walking on the verge of the A950, before and after Deer Abbey.

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

Difficulty: Easy.

Dog Friendly: Yes, but keep dogs on lead near to livestock and wildfowl, and on the main A950 road.

Refreshments: Options in Mintlaw and in nearby Aden Country Park. The walk passes the Saplin Brae hotel where there is a bar and restaurant.



Description

This easy and pleasant walk in open countryside, and on woodland and lakeside paths, holds lots of historical interest along the way. The first section of the route follows the track of the old Buchan railway line (Peterhead to Maud). The line was opened in the mid 19th Century but closed to passenger traffic in the Beeching cuts of the mid 20th Century. Nearing the mid-point of the walk, the route stops off at the fascinating ruins of Deer Abbey, built in the 13th Century, but abandoned after the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century. The Book of Deer (now held by Cambridge University) is associated with the Abbey's former library. It contains the first written examples of the Gaelic language and was created in the 10th Century. On the second part of the walk, the route meets the beautiful Pitfour Lake, covering more than 50 acres. With its four islands and three stone bridges, it was created in the mid 19th Century as the grand centre-piece of an opulent Scottish landed estate. On the lakeside we encounter a sadly dilapidated (at time of writing) 'folly' – in the form of a small replica Greek Doric temple, styled after the Temple of Theseus, and probably built around 1830. It contained a cold-water bath in which George, the fifth laird was believed to have kept alligators! Thankfully none survive, so you are safe to take the scenic grassy path close to the water's edge. At one point, the route ascends to a marvellous vantage point over the lake and the surrounding countryside before returning to the lakeside and back along the old railway line.



Waypoints

(1) Start outside Taylor's furniture shop

(57.52647; -2.02685)

Start the walk from the car-park outside Taylor's Furniture/Beds Direkt on the outskirts of Mintlaw Station, and follow the narrow path with the minor road on your right, and with Taylor's Furniture building on your left. Very soon you arrive at the old Buchan railway line where you turn left and follow the path out of Mintlaw Station.



(2) Carry on taking the old railway line

(57.52612; -2.03096)

In 300 m, carry on walking along the old railway line, passing the path to your right signed for Pitfour Lake (you will return on that path near the end of the walk). (303 m)



(3) Cross road and go left to carry on the old railway line

(57.52559; -2.03222)

In 100 m, or so, cross the busy A950 road with great care and re-join the old railway line path where there is an information board. Go right on the path of the old line, continuing out of the Mintlaw Station area into the countryside. (403 m)



(4) Keep going on track of old railway line

(57.52269; -2.04272)

In another 700 m, keep going along the track of the old railway line, ignoring a signed path to your right for Saplin Brae and Pitfour Lake. (1.1 km)



(5) Right here and over bridge

(57.52293; -2.05822)

In 1 km, where the old railway line path meets a narrow road, go right and over the narrow bridge up to the junction with the A950 road. Go right at the A950 road to walk along the verge towards the high walls of Deer Abbey ahead of you on your right. (2.1 km)



(6) Deer Abbey

(57.52372; -2.05409)

In about 300 m from leaving the old railway line, and walking along the A950 back in the direction of Mintlaw Station, you will arrive at the entrance to the fascinating and well signed ruins of Deer Abbey*, built in the 13th Century, but abandoned after the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century. The Book of Deer, with the first written examples of the Gaelic language, is believed to have been created at an earlier monastery in Old Deer, established by St Drostan, in the 10th Century, and kept in Deer Abbey library whilst the abbey was in operation (it is now held at Cambridge University). When you are ready, return to the verge of the A950 road, go right and carry on walking back in the direction of Mintlaw Station.

**Note: there is free access to the Abbey and opening times are to be found here - <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/deer-abbey/history/>*



(7) Cross road into grounds of Saplin Brae Hotel

(57.52492; -2.04682)

In 800 m, cross the A950 road with care to enter into the car-park and grounds of the Saplin Brae Hotel. With the hotel building (based on an old 18th Century coach-house) on your left, pass the buildings, taking an access road on a gentle up-slope. (3.2 km)



(8) Veer right towards trees

(57.52584; -2.04664)

In 100 m, or so, as you pass the rear of the hotel on your left, veer right past some trees to take the rough road through fields on either side, walking away from the hotel buildings. (3.3 km)



(9) Right down path into trees

(57.52706; -2.04526)

In another 200 m, or so, go right, off the rough road, to take the path into the trees. (3.5 km)



(10) Carry straight on

(57.52700; -2.04401)

In approximately 100 m, ignore the path on your left and carry straight on through the trees. (3.6 km)



(11) Take left fork here

(57.52711; -2.04262)

In 100 m, or so, at a clearing, take the path veering to your left, towards the lake. (3.7 km)



(12) Go left at lake

(57.52753; -2.04237)

In 50 m, or so, you will have arrived at the beautiful Pitfour Lake, covering more than 50 acres. With its four islands and stone bridges, it was created in the mid 19th Century as the grand centre-piece of an opulent Scottish landed estate. Go left along the rough road at the lakeside towards a small columned building (probably covered in scaffolding). (3.75 km)



(13) Take lakeside path past temple and fishers hut

(57.52844; -2.04372)

In 100 m you will have arrived at a sadly dilapidated (at time of writing, Aug 2018) Pitfour Estate 'folly'. It is a small replica Greek Doric temple, styled after the Temple of Theseus. Its exact date of construction is unknown, but according to Historic Scotland, it was built 'probably circa 1835'. It contained a cold-water bath in which George, the fifth laird was believed to have kept alligators! Thankfully none survive, so you are safe to carry on past the temple and the nearby fishers' hut, taking the scenic grassy path close to the water's edge. Soon you will re-join the rough estate road you encountered at Waypoint 12. Carry on taking this road. (3.85 km)



(14) Veer right to continue on main estate road

(57.53065; -2.04745)

In 250 m from the temple, veer right to continue on the main estate road and at the next junction go right to pass behind the old kennels building, now a private residence. Carry on taking what becomes a (rough and cracked) concrete surfaced narrow road. There are marvellous open views on your right, down to the lake, and beyond. (4.2 km)



(15) Veer left away from concrete surfaced road

(57.53225; -2.04066)

In 600 m, veer away slightly left from the concrete road. At the time of writing (Aug 2018), some limited construction of new houses was ongoing and the concrete road you were on is barred at this point. Continue taking the road through the trees behind the large building plots, soon passing a house on your left. (4.8 km)



(16) Right and down towards lake

(57.53264; -2.03578)

In 300 m, go right and take the road going gently downhill towards the lake. Cross the bridge and carry on taking the road. (5.1 km)



(17) Left after crossing second bridge

(57.52769; -2.03704)

In 700 m, having crossed a second, smaller bridge, turn immediately left and take the track along the side of the lake. Keep taking this track/path alongside the lake, ignoring any turn-offs to you right. Eventually the path will turn away from the lake through the trees towards a minor public road. (5.8 km)



(18) Veer left across road for path

(57.52592; -2.03283)

In 400 m, at an opening and gate onto a minor public road, take care and veer left across the road, passing a small car-park on your right as you make for the path at the corner of the car-park. Take this path. (6.2 km)



(19) Left back along old railway line

(57.52617; -2.03092)

In about 200 m, you will arrive at a t-junction with the old railway path you passed at Waypoint 2. Go left here back along the railway line. (6.4 km)



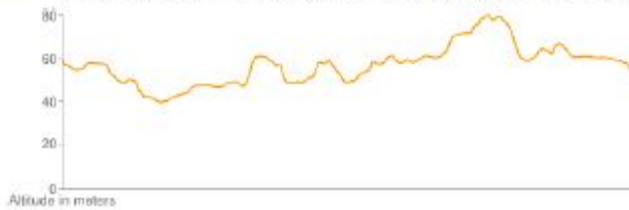
(20) Right before bridge and back to start

(57.52646; -2.02694)

In a further 300 m you will have gone right before a road bridge to take the path by the furniture store. At the end of the short path you will arrived back at your start-point. (6.7 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](#)