

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Forest of Birse Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This is an easy upland walk in an enchanting valley surrounded by high hills. There are good views throughout the route, with a fine perspective of Birse Castle. However, this walk won't suit everyone due to the fords to be crossed, and the consequent possible wet feet factor!

Duration: 2.5 hours.



Route Overview

Duration: 2.5 hours.

Transport/Parking: No public transport nearby. Small parking area at walk start-point.

Length: 6.280 km / 3.93 mi

Height Gain: 125 meter. **Height Loss:** 125 meter.

Max Height: 299 meter. **Min Height:** 214 meter.

Surface: Mostly on good land-rover tracks, paths and farm access roads. A 1 km section on minor tarred road at end. 3 fords to cross. [see *Description, below*]

Difficulty: Medium.

Child Friendly: Please consider if the forded water crossings are suitable for your children.

Dog Friendly: Yes, but keep dogs on lead. There are farm animals and ground-nesting birds.

Refreshments: We can recommend the Finzean Farm Shop and Tea Room.



Description

This route makes a gentle ascent onto the heather-clad southern slopes of the Forest of Birse, where there are wonderful views over the little green valley with its tumbling burns*, patchwork of fields, a baronial castle, and a little 19thC church. The return route passes through the valley itself, overlooked on all sides by high moorland, and makes a visit to the tiny old kirk, which is open to the public. There is a relatively long drive-in on a single track road from the Finzean area, giving the valley a remote and special appeal – a sort of Scottish Shangri-la in miniature! In terms of economic activity, only some upland livestock farming survives, with the heather moors above the fields extensively managed for driven grouse shooting. Over 1000 years ago the valley formed part of a Hunting Forest for the Scottish kings, presumably explaining its name today. Now owned by the Dunecht Estate, Birse Castle occupies a prominent position on the northern slopes of the valley. Originally a square tower built in the late 16thC, it has been rebuilt and extended a number of times and is now in a z-plan layout. Over the centuries there have many disputes about land ownership, grazing and hunting rights. In 1999 a ground-breaking agreement was reached in which the ancient rights over the forest held by all the inhabitants of Birse parish were vested in a body known as the Birse Community Trust. For more info about the Forest of Birse, see: <https://tinyurl.com/y5jatqnx>



**Note: The Forest of Birse forms the main catchment area for the Water of Feugh. There are 3 fords to be crossed on this walk: at the Rough Burn; at the Water of Feugh (Waypoint 4); and, the Burn of Allanstank (the Feugh is the widest and deepest crossing). Although there are a few stepping stones to assist, some are under the water surface, and some are missing! Using walking poles will help. Be prepared to get your feet wet, especially after significant rainfall. So, please consider carefully if this walk will suit you?*

Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Burnfoot access road

(57.00573; -2.75537) <https://w3w.co/scooter.months.signs>

The walk starts from a small parking area opposite the downhill access road, heading south, to the Burnfoot keeper's cottage* off the Forest of Birse access road (there is a slightly larger parking area at the side of the road about 50 m further on). A forest road goes in the opposite direction, north, into the trees, uphill. Walk downhill towards Burnfoot Cottage, crossing the bridge over the Water of Feugh, then taking the land-rover track that bypasses the cottage on its right side. Soon you will have to cross the Rough Burn on stepping stones as you continue on the track as it goes gently uphill through a grazing area towards the abandoned Auchabrack Croft.



Note: this is approximately 5.4 km along the Forest of Birse access road from the Finzean Sawmills. If you 'overshoot' this spot, you will arrive at the Forest of Birse car-park, 1 km further along the road (you could start and finish the walk from there, if you wish).*

***Note: to get to the Finzean Water Mills: 1. From Banchory – take B974 to Strachan. 2. Continue west from Strachan on B976 (South Deeside Road) for 6 km. 3. At Farquarson Park in Finzean, as the B976 bends right, towards the north-west, take the minor road going straight ahead and west, signposted for Forest of Birse and Finzean Farm Shop and Tearoom. 4. In 900 m, or so, ignore the turn off veering right for the Finzean Farm Shop and Tearoom and carry straight on, going in a westerly direction on the Forest of Birse access road. 5. In another 2 km you will arrive at the Finzean Sawmills where there is an information board on your right side (the Forest of Birse access road carries on for another 6.3 km to the Forest of Birse Kirk at the opening to the Forest of Birse glen).*

(2) Follow track as it veers right - away from Auchabrack buildings

(57.00274; -2.75718) <https://w3w.co/crossing.panicking.intervene>

In just under 400 m, before the access road to the abandoned Auchabrack buildings, follow the land-rover track as it sweeps to the right and away from Auchabrack. The track heads towards another abandoned building. In about 350 m, pass the building on your right as the track bends left past an old sheep dip on your left, then right to pass some low ruins on your left. At that point the track enters moorland and proceeds gently uphill, with heather on either side. (381 m)



(3) Take right fork at y-junction

(56.99752; -2.77253) <https://w3w.co/tangling.restrict.solves>

In 1.2 km from Waypoint 2 the road splits at a y-junction. Take the right fork and continue gently uphill. Tremendous views open up down to your right of the Forest of Birse glen and Birse Castle as you pass the highest point on the route and start to descend. (1.6 km)



(4) Cross Water of Feugh at ford

(56.99503; -2.78991) <https://w3w.co/glove.kilowatt.trapdoor>

In 1.2 km you will arrive at a ford over the Water of Feugh.

Although the volume of water flow is much less here than further down the valley, you will need to pick your way carefully over the stream as best you can on less than perfect stepping stones (to deal with any uncertainty, you may decide to take off your socks and shoes and cross on bare feet!). (2.8 km)



(5) Right and downhill at Fungle Mounth junction

(56.99331; -2.79212) <https://w3w.co/cars.friend.hiring>

Once you have crossed the Water of Feugh obstacle, in about 200 m you will arrive at a junction with the old Fungle Road/Mounth path*. Turn sharp right here to go north, and, in about 150 m, you will need to cross a ford at the Burn of Allanstank. However, the stream is quite narrow and you will probably be able to jump from bank to bank just a little downstream from the ford. Carry on walking north, in the general direction of Birse Castle, once you are over the burn. (3.0 km)



*Note: an old drove road between Deeside and Glen Esk - '*Sir James Balfour of Denmilne (1600-1651) prepared a list of Mounth passes which is printed in the Spalding Club Collections on the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff, printed in 1843. He calls this route the Forest of Birse Mounth, 'from Cairn Corse to Birse on Deeside'. Cairncross is at Tarfside. The route is shown on Roy's map and so must have been an important road at the time. This is one of the most important of the Mounth Passes and is said to have been frequented by many whisky smugglers ...*'. See: <http://www.heritagepaths.co.uk/pathdetails.php?path=127>

(6) Straight on to follow Right of Way path signed for Finzean

(56.99873; -2.79037) <https://w3w.co/dorms.rooftop.vibes>

In 700 m, the track rises up a low embankment where there is a right-of-way walks signpost. Carry straight on here then veer slightly right, following an old right-of-way path for Finzean (nowadays, more a sheep path) across the grazing area, with Birse Castle above you on your left. After you cross the open field, the path dips down to cross the Burn of Corn at a ford. Thankfully, there is a concrete footbridge. Cross the bridge and veer right to continue onwards, with the buildings of Ballochlan Farm now clearly in view at a raised level ahead of you. (3.7 km)



(7) Left through gate onto grassy Right of Way path

(57.00171; -2.78618) <https://w3w.co/eyelashes.piled.scrap>

In about 400 m from Waypoint 6, and 170 m from the bridge you have just crossed, go through the second gate on your left (carefully closing it behind you) to follow the grassy right-of-way path gently uphill, bypassing the farm-house and farm buildings on your left. Soon, in about 130 m, you will have reached the farm access road where you continue following the right-of-way route, away from Ballochan Farm, in an easterly direction now. Keep walking along the rough access road for about 860 m to the next waypoint where you will turn right for the old church. (4.1 km)



(8) Right down path to Forest of Birse Church

(57.00412; -2.77136) <https://w3w.co/helping.alarming.pronouns>

In 1 km from the last waypoint, the old Forest of Birse church will be obvious, below you on your right. Turn right to take the path down to the church. (5.1 km)



(9) Forest of Birse Church

(57.00364; -2.77048) <https://w3w.co/rejoins.loaded.intricate>

In about 100 m you will have arrived at the door of the Forest of Birse Church*. There is a (crumbling) bench outside to rest and take in the view. This sheltered spot is a favourite picnic spot for those in the know on a sunny day. The door to the church is open (on our two visits, so far) and the simple interior of the old kirk is well worth a look. When you are ready, re-trace your steps to the tarred minor Forest of Birse access road. Turn right upon meeting the road and walk back along the road towards your start-point, about 1km ahead of you. (5.2 km)



**Note: '... the church or chapel was built in the early 1890s to act as a church and school for the remote and sparsely-populated community. It replaced a late 18th century church built by local heritors. A small ruin close to the church was the school teacher's house, but this was abandoned in the 1890s and the church ceased to be a school in 1933. The church is still in use today for fairly regular services ...'* See:

<http://www.scottishchurches.org.uk/sites/site/id/9652/name/Forest+of+Birse+Church+Birse+Grampian>

(10) Finish walk back at start point

(57.00572; -2.75547) <https://w3w.co/scooter.months.signs>

In 1.1 km from the church door, you will have arrived back at your start point at the Burnfoot road-end. (6.3 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](#)