The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Forvie Reserve-Hackley Bay Ramble (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

This walk offers a variety of environments: heath-land; rocky sea-cliffs; an isolated sandy cove; capped of with a visit to the pretty former fishing village of Collieston. The distance covered, and overall ascent, is moderate, and should suit walkers of all abilities.

Duration: 2.75 hours.

Route Overview

Duration: 2.75 hours.
Transport/Parking: The nearest public transport is the Stagecoach bus service that passes through Cruden Bay. Check timetable. It would be a 2 km walk from your drop-off point on the A975 to the start of the walk. There is a car-park at the start of the walk at the Forvie Visitor Centre.
Length: 7.550 km / 4.72 mi
Height Gain: 145 meter **Height Loss:** 145 meter
Max Height: 46 meter **Min Height:** 0 meter
Surface: Moderate. Mostly on good paths. Some sections may be muddy after wet weather.
Child Friendly: Yes, if children are used to walks of this distance and overall ascent.
Difficulty: Medium.
Dog Friendly: Yes. On lead on public roads and near to any farm livestock.
Refreshments: The Smuggler's Cone cafe/ice cream vendor near the beach in Collieston. Closed during winter months. Open at weekends in summer months, every day during summer school holidays. Otherwise, Briggies (Newburgh Inn) in Newburgh, or The Barn cafe in Foveran.

Description

This is a pleasant and varied ramble in the Forvie National Nature Reserve, through the wild coastal heath-land of Forvie Moor, meeting impressive cliffs that lead to an isolated and pristine bay beneath Hackley Head. Near the end of the walk there are wonderful views from the headland above the lower part of Collieston village to its harbour and little beach. The nature reserve covers almost 1,000 hectares of sand dunes and dune heath between the estuary of the River Ythan and Collieston. It is home to a rich variety of wildlife. In Spring, the sea cliffs are dotted with primroses, cowslips and butterwort. In Summer they are splashed with colour as pink-flowered thrift, sea campion, kidney vetch and purple northern marsh-orchid come into bloom. In Autumn, the moor is purple with blooming heather, dotted with succulent crowberry, and there is an abundance of fungi of all shapes, sizes and colours. In Winter, the lochs are home to overwintering waders. Hackley Bay, often described as a "hidden gem", "perfect smugglers' cove" and "beautiful sandy bay", is a breath-taking focal point on the route, mid-way through the walk. In WW2, Forvie Moor was used to train soldiers in the use of grenades and mortars. Whilst soldiers were training there, the moor was off limits to locals. However, on Sundays, local people could use the moor to collect birds eggs and to hunt rabbits, to supplement their food rations. Collieston was well established as a fishing village by the 16th century as it provides the first safe harbour in over fifteen miles of beaches and dunes stretching north from Aberdeen. Fishing for herring, haddock, whiting and cod flourished in the 17th century and 18th century and the village became known for "Collieston Speldings", salted and sun-dried haddock and whiting, a popular delicacy well-known throughout Britain. Today, the village is a commuter base and holiday home destination.

Waypoints

(1) Start walk at Forvie Reserve Visitor Centre

(57.35090; -1.94520)

Start the walk at the information board outside the Forvie Nature Reserve Visitor Centre near Collieston. Follow the obvious path into the reserve. It is marked for the "Heath Trail".

(2) After gate - head straight on taking Heath Trail

(57.35005; -1.94784)

After about 230 m you come to a set of gates. Pass through the pedestrian gate and follow the "Heath Trail" path straight ahead of you. Keep following this path as it winds its way through the dunes and heathland. Soon, it has a hard, grit surface. There are many paths going off to right and left that you should ignore. (233 m)

(3) Take right fork here - not left shortcut

(57.34639; -1.94931)

In 500 m, or so, you come to a y-junction. Take the right fork here - not the left option marked as "Shortcut". Keep on this path for almost 1.5 km, marked periodically on posts with the clover sign for the "Heath Path". Nearing the coast you will pass by a small loch on your left. (751 m)

(4) Go right upon meeting coastal path

(57.33942; -1.94627)

In 1.45 km you will have arrived at a t-junction where the "Heath Trail" meets the coastal path on the cliff-tops. Go right here to follow the coastal path. (2.2 km)

(5) Carry on - don't take dangerous path left

(57.33477; -1.95432)
In 700 m, you will have arrived above Hackley Bay, at the north end. Do NOT take the steep path on your left down to Hackley Bay. It is marked as dangerous. Carry on taking the coastal path above and behind the Bay. The distance to steps down to the Bay is marked as 300 m. It is, in fact, 500 m to these steps. (2.9 km)

(6) Go left down steps to Hackley Bay

(57.33186; -1.95562)
In 500 m, the coastal path arrives at a path with granite steps down to the south end of Hackley Bay. Unless there is a very high tide*, you should be able to walk on the beach. (3.4 km)

*See:
https://tides.willyweather.co.uk/gr/aberdeenshire/hackley-bay.html

(7) Hackley Bay

(57.33374; -1.95568)
Assuming the state of the tide permits, you will want to take some time to explore the lovely beach at Hackley Bay, and the rocks and rock pools around it. When you are ready, return to the steps at the south end of the beach and ascend to the cliff-top. Now re-trace your steps along the coastal path to Waypoint 4, where you joined it. (3.9 km)

(8) Carry on taking coastal path to Collieston

(57.33942; -1.94641)
In 1.4 km, at Waypoint 4 where you joined the coastal path earlier, carry on taking the coastal path along the cliff-tops towards the village of Collieston. (5.3 km)

(9) Pass through pedestrian access by the gate on path to Collieston

(57.34344; -1.94261)

In 600 m, upon arriving at a fence and gate, beside an information board for Forvie Reserve, pass through the pedestrian access gap and carry on taking the coastal path along the cliff-tops to Collieston. When the path reaches the edge of Collieston, carry straight on, without deviating to left or right onto the little street with houses on either side marked on the maps as Whiteness Cottages. (5.9 km)

(10) Right onto grassy headland

(57.34604; -1.93663)

In 500 m, go right off the Whiteness Cottages street into an obvious lane that leads onto the grassy headland above Collieston Harbour and the lower village. Do not be concerned that you are entering a private garden! You are not. You will want to explore the headland, where there is a sun dial and benches, taking in the views both north and south, and to the harbour and beach below you. (6.4 km)

(11) Right onto marked Shallie Brae path

(57.34628; -1.93578)

When you are ready, swing around towards the nearest cottage, where there is a wooden sign pointing to a path marked as the "Shallie Brae Path". Take this path past the front of some cottages, but where there is an option to go down and right towards the harbour and beach, veer slightly left and uphill towards the tarred main street (B9003). When you meet the tarred road, go left and uphill, past the wooden house named "The Cabin" on your right. (6.6 km)

(12) Right at Forvie Court to return to Forvie Visitor Centre

(57.34581; -1.93777)

In 200 m from leaving the headland area, at a road sign for Forvie Court, turn right to follow a road that becomes an access road to private houses, passing the large expanse of Sand Loch on your left. At the last house, the access road becomes a grassy path that will take you back to the Forvie Reserve Visitor Centre where you started the walk. (6.8 km)

(13) Finish walk back at Forvie Visitor Centre

(57.35094; -1.94508)

In 800 m, you will have returned to the Forvie Reserve Visitor Centre where you started the walk. (7.6 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