

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Glenbuchat-Meikle Firbriggs Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

After a scenic walk-in along the Glenbuchat valley, there is a stiff climb up a heather-clad hillside to the Meikle and Little Firbriggs summits where there are wonderful views of the Glen below, and panoramic views to further afield, including towards the Cairngorms.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



Route Overview

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

Length: 7.650 km / 4.78 mi

Height Gain: 319 meter. **Height Loss:** 319 meter.

Max Height: 557 meter. **Min Height:** 258 meter.

Surface: Moderate. The first 2 km are on a very quiet minor tarred road. Mostly good land-rover track after that. Small section on new but overgrown grassy path near end.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

Dog Friendly: Yes, but dogs on lead at all times (public road, then open hill with grazing sheep).

Refreshments: Options at Kildrummy Inn and in Alford.



Description

After an enjoyable walk up the very quiet and scenic Culstruphan Road in Glenbuchat, the route turns at Beltimb Croft, where there is the ruin of an old lime kiln, to make a fairly steep climb on heather moorland to the ridge on the northern side of the glen. Here, you have the option to deviate left to the Creag an Eunan summit which adds about 2.5 km to the overall route length.

Turning right to the Meikle Firbriggs top, there are wonderful views of the Glenbuchat valley below you and to distant hilltops. We identified Mount Shade, Clachnaben, Peter Hill, Morven, Mount Battock, Mount Keen, Lochnagar, Beinn A'Bhuird, and Ben Avon. Moving on, at the summit of Little Firbriggs, you now have a good view of the Buck of Cabrach and across to the Bennachie range. Remote Glenbuchat was once home to a diverse community of 500 people, living off the upland landscape in a mostly self-sufficient and inter-dependant way, and having little need for the outside world. As the information board at Glenbuchat Castle puts it – “Before you stands the Perfect Glen, so called because it held all that was needed for life. Lairds and smugglers, farmers and fiddlers, poachers and preachers all thrived here”. The people mostly lived in little settlements called “clachans” spread throughout the glen. A clachan is a type of small traditional settlement, invariably found on poorer land, and common in the more remote areas of Scotland up until the early 20thC. Up to 1850 there were at least seven main clachan settlements in Glenbuchat. In 1902, the Aberdeen Free Press reported that five of these were still occupied. Today, the clachans are gone, but a modern upland agricultural community still thrives in the glen, with the population a tenth of what it was at one time. Before or after the walk we suggest you visit nearby Glenbuchat Castle, for many years associated with the Gordon family. The ruined castle dates back to the 16thC, and is currently unsafe, but it is possible to walk in the surrounding grassy area to take in the fine views, and imagine the castle’s past glories and intrigues. Above the lintel on the door of the castle you can still make out the inscription - “nocht on earth remainis bot faime”. This is taken to be a fitting epitaph for the eventual decline of the Gordon dynasty. For more information about Glenbuchat’s history, see: <http://www.glenbuchatheritage.com/index.asp>



Waypoints

(1) Start the walk by walking along the minor Glenbuchat road

(57.22824; -3.00408) <https://w3w.co/dearest.comforted.townhouse>

Start the walk from a rough parking area more or less opposite the access road to Blackhillock Farm. This is almost 1.2 km from the Glenbuchat junction on the A97 Strathdon main road. Facing the access to Blackhillock Farm, turn left and walk along the minor tarred road heading into the Glenbuchat valley.



(2) Carry straight on at junction - onto Culstruphan Road

(57.23063; -3.01256) <https://w3w.co/testy.brushing.trimmer>

In 600 m, where the Glenbuchat minor road bends left, carry straight on the Culstruphan Road, passing some houses on your right. Keep going on this road for 2.1 km. (605 m)



(3) Right onto Beltimb access road

(57.24069; -3.03759) <https://w3w.co/polishing.parsnip.skim>

After 2.1 km, go sharp right to walk up the Beltimb access road. In about 270 m you will pass the ruins of an old lime kiln in a fenced enclosure on your right. Walking on, passing the steading (no longer a working farm) and access to the Beltimb Cottage. As you carry straight on, go through a farm gate, then in another 130 m, through another farm gate, after which the land-rover track starts to ascend the heather hillside. (2.7 km)



(4) Continue straight uphill at y-junction

(57.24404; -3.02404) <https://w3w.co/holdings.midwinter.camera>

In 1 km from Waypoint 3, where you left the tarred road, you will arrive at a y-junction. Take the left fork which continues to ascend the hillside, quite steeply at times. (3.7 km)



(5) Right at t-junction after ascent

(57.24846; -3.01544) <https://w3w.co/swimsuits.flipper.slave>
After 700 m of mostly steep ascent you will be relieved to arrive at at-junction on the hilltop ridge (545 m above sea level). Your route is right here*, heading SE along the land-rover track towards the fairly indistinct Meikle Firbriggs summit ahead of you. (4.4 km)

**Note: you have the option to deviate left here for the nearby Clachmaddy summit (590 m) and, further to the Creag an Eunan summit (633 m). The there and back walk to Creag an Eunan adds about 2.5 km to the overall route length.*



(6) Summit of Meikle Firbriggs

(57.24612; -3.01085) <https://w3w.co/dozens.deeds.shovels>
After 400 m very minimal ascent you will have arrived at the fairly flat summit area of the Meikle Firbriggs hill (557 m). There is a small cairn behind the fence on your left which may identify the highest point. There are wonderful views of the Glenbuchat valley below you and to distant hilltops. We identified Mount Shade, Clachnaben, Peter Hill, Morven, Mount Battock, Mount Keen, Lochnagar, Beinn A'Bhuird, Ben Avon. When you are ready, carry on walking along the land-rover track in a SE direction. The track dips then ascends to to the top of Little Firbriggs. (4.8 km)



(7) Summit of Little Firbriggs

(57.24246; -3.00379) <https://w3w.co/syndicate.readjust.deliver>
In 600 m you will have arrived at a small cairn of stones on a grassy hummock to your right which we take to be the summit of Little Firbriggs (528 m). In addition to the views enjoyed at the Meikle Firbriggs summit, you now have a good view of the Buck of Cabrach to your NNE and you can also now identify the Correen Hills and Bennachie range, broadly to your NE. When you are ready, carry on taking the land-rover track as it starts to descend, quite steeply in places. As the track starts to level out, ignore tracks going off to your right and proceed on to a field gate straight ahead of you. (5.4 km)



(8) Right and downhill after passing through gate

(57.23887; -2.99479) <https://w3w.co/statue.glee.grad>
After descending for 800 m, go through the field gate (closing it carefully behind you) and almost immediately turn sharp right to follow a track downhill, with a new deer fence on your right side. (6.2 km)



(9) Left at deer gate and follow deer fence downhill

(57.23690; -2.99510) <https://w3w.co/unframed.frostbite.sparrows>
In 400 m the track meets a high deer gate. A left-pointing arrow sign on the gate indicates that walkers should avoid the gate (you cannot open it properly in any case, due to entangled grass in chicken wire at its base). Go left past the gate and follow a narrow path downhill with the deer fence very close on your right side. (6.4 km)



(10) Right at corner of deer fence and downhill through gate

(57.23317; -2.99582) <https://w3w.co/megawatt.having.flows>
In another 400 m, you will arrive at a corner on the deer fence. Here, another arrow sign indicates you should turn right to follow the lower edge of the deer fence downhill. First, you have to cross a farm track and negotiate your way through a loosely tied farm gate (be sure to close it properly behind you) before carrying on your descent on a now overgrown (Summer 2020) grassy path with a small conifer plantation on your left side and the deer fence close on your right side. In 130 m you will cross over another farm track and continue downhill on the grassy path (now even more overgrown) with the deer fence still close on your right side. Soon you will spot a stile below and ahead of you at the next corner of the deer fence. (6.8 km)



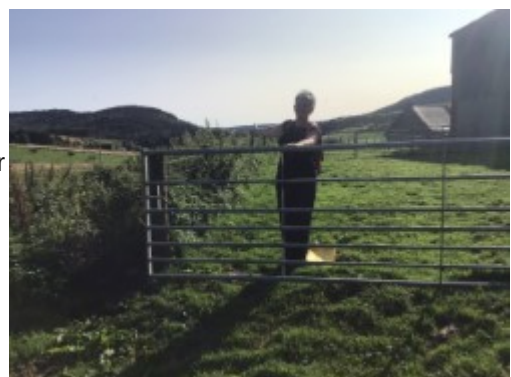
(11) Over stile and right - then left and downhill on track

(57.23223; -2.99956) <https://w3w.co/dramatic.lied.passenger>
After descending for 300 m cross over the stile at the corner of the deer fence and go right. In 30 m you will arrive at a grassy track where there is a deer fence gate. With your back to the gate, follow the track downhill towards Blackhillock Farm. At the lowest point on the track, cross a bridge over a little burn and ascend a short slope to a farm gate on the left side of the farm buildings. (7.1 km)



(12) Through gate and pass to left of farm buildings

(57.23012; -3.00225) <https://w3w.co/charmingly.womb.appraised>
In 300, after crossing the burn and ascending towards the left side of the farm buildings, go through the gate, closing and securing it carefully behind you. Go ahead and then veer right to pass through a gap between the main farm buildings on your right and a small bothy-type building on your left in order to go through another gate which takes you to the access road for Blackhillock farm and farm-house. Now follow this access road as it goes gently downhill, away from the farm and towards your start-point on the tarred Glenbuchat Road. (7.4 km)



(13) Finish walk back at parking space opposite Blackhillock Farm access road

(57.22823; -3.00396) <https://w3w.co/dearest.comforted.townhouse>

In 300 m you will emerge from the Blackhillock Farm access road onto the tarred Glenbuchat Road and the parking area where you started the walk. To your SE you will pick out the ruin of Glenbuchat Castle*. (7.7 km)

**Note: After the walk, we suggest you consider visiting the grounds of nearby Glenbuchat Castle, just off the A97 road, close to the Glenbuchat access road. The castle ruin itself is unsafe and you should maintain a distance from the presently crumbling building. For many years it was associated with the Gordon family. The ruined castle, dates back to the 16th C, and is currently unsafe, but it is possible to walk in the surrounding grassy area to take in the fine views, and imagine the castle's past glories and intrigues. Above the lintel on the door of the castle you can still make out the inscription - "Nocht on earth remainis bot faime". This is taken to be a fitting epitaph to the eventual decline of the Gordon dynasty.*

Info and directions here: <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/glenbuchat-castle/>

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](#)