

# The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

## Keig-Turf Hill Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

### Route Summary

Although this is a short hill-walk to a relatively low wooded summit, the ascent provides good exercise and fine views. As it is one of the least known tops on the Bennachie range, you are unlikely to meet fellow walkers. The Cothiemuir Stone Circle makes for a memorable visit during the final section.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



### Route Overview

**Duration:** 3.5 hours.

**Transport/Parking:** The Inch-Alford Stagecoach 422 bus stops in Keig. Check timetables. Small parking area at walk start-point, or on-street parking in Keig.

**Length:** 7.58 km / 4.71 mi

**Height Gain:** 246 meter. **Height Loss:** 246 meter.

**Max Height:** 371 meter. **Min Height:** 130 meter.

**Surface:** Moderate. Mostly on rough moorland paths and rough estate roads. Approximately 1 km walking on Lord's Throat quiet minor road. Believed not suitable for off-road mobility scooters due to the steep, stony and narrow paths both ascending and descending Turf Hill, and (currently, at May 2022) large fallen trees near the Stone Circle.

**Difficulty:** Medium/Hard (steep ascent section to Turf Hill summit).

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

**Dog Friendly:** Yes, keep dogs on lead in the Castle Forbes estate, on public roads, and near to any farm animals.

**Refreshments:** Options in Alford.



### Description

This is a great wee hill walk with an impressive finale at the ancient Cothiemuir Stone Circle. Much of the route is on a heather and bracken hillside with great views in all directions. There is an energetic ascent, passing abandoned grouse butts, gaining the highest point in a relatively short distance. In the early section of the route there is a good view of Castle Forbes, a 19<sup>th</sup> C mansion house in Scottish Baronial style. Turf Hill is one of the lower tops on the Bennachie range. It overlooks Keig on the south-western edge of the range, which provides it with a marvellous viewpoint over the Howe of Alford, the nearby Menaway Hills and up to the principal Bennachie tors visible from the southern side: Mither Tap, Oxen Craig, and Watch Craig. In the distance, Morven and Mount Keen are prominent. In the early part of the ascent up Turf Hill there are good views of the Hill of Airlie to the immediate west. Here, a patchwork of fields lead up to a wooded hilltop. Hidden in the trees are the remains of an Iron Age hill-fort, with double defensive rings, known as the Barmkyn of North Keig. The hill has very uniform slopes on all sides, allowing our ancestors who lived there, or who sought refuge there, to readily see any potentially hostile approaches. The Cothiemuir Hill Stone Circle, now also in a wooded glade, is known as the Devil's Hoofmarks due to natural indentations in the recumbent stone. Although upright stones are missing around the circle, the recumbent stone and flankers are particularly impressive. The recumbent is thought to weigh over 20 tons and the flankers are around 9 ft tall. Typically, the aspect over the recumbent is towards the south-west, and the circle is believed to have been built more than 4,000 years ago on the site of an earlier burial cairn with a central chamber (the covering stone still lies in the centre of the circle).



## Waypoints

### (1) Start walk at entrance to Castle Forbes estate – at Keig

<https://w3w.co/gravy.reconnect.mice> NJ6142019099

From the entrance to Castle Forbes estate at the outskirts of Keig, on the B992 road to Auchleven, follow the access road for almost 100 m, then take the road veering right, passing a football field on your right side. In another 165 m, go left and cross a stone bridge over the Burn of Keig. Carry on taking the now tarred access road. As Castle Forbes\* becomes closer on your right side, and after a small pond on your left side, at a y-junction, follow the road veering to the left towards a t-junction with another estate access road.



*\*Note: Thanks to Wikipedia for the following: "Castle Forbes is a 19th C country house in the Scottish baronial architecture style ... The ... estate has been home to the Forbes [family] for over 600 years ... The present building overlooking the River Don was built in 1815 by the 17th Lord Forbes, to designs by the architect Archibald Simpson ... Today it is occupied by [the] 23rd Lord Forbes and is open to residential guests ..."*

### (2) Turn left along estate access road

In 800 m, at a t-junction with a rough estate access road, go left and follow this road, passing various building on your left side. Keep going until you arrive at a t-junction with the Lord's Throat minor public road. (800 m)



### (3) Turn right onto Lord's Throat minor road

In 600 m, at a t-junction with the Lord's Throat minor public road, turn right and walk along this quiet road for about 500 m, passing a couple of farm access roads on your left side. (1.4 km)



#### (4) Left up quarry access road at Pond Croft

In 500 m, as the road bends right, passing a house on either side, veer slightly left onto the rough access road for Pond Croft. Almost immediately go sharp left up a rough access road for a sand quarry. Pass under or around the wooden vehicle barrier and proceed gently uphill, soon passing an overgrown old quarry/sand-pit on your right side. (1.9 km)



#### (5) Veer left onto path through bushes before quarry

In 300 m, or so, just before the rough access road reaches the sand quarries ahead of you, veer slightly left off the road onto an indistinct path through the bushes. (2.21 km)



#### (6) Take right fork at y-junction

Very soon, in about 80 m, the path through the bushes arrives at a y-junction\* (you may notice an old wooden footpath sign on your left, here). Take the right fork and carry on taking the narrow path uphill through the bushes. Soon you will emerge out of the bushes onto the heather hillside. You will carry on taking this path for about 1.6 km, going uphill towards the summit of Turf Hill above you, and passing some old grouse butts along the way as you pass through the area of woodland at the summit of Turf Hill. From there you carry on taking the path in a northerly direction along a wide moorland ridge and through a dry-stone wall towards a forestry plantation, before the next waypoint. ( 2.28 km )



*\*Note: you will return to this junction during the final stage of your descent from Turf Hill.*

#### (7) Veer left after passing through posts

In 1.6 km, and soon after passing through a gap in a dry stone wall, you will then pass through a couple of posts and veer left to follow the path as it starts to descend in a westerly direction, with the forestry plantation now on your right side. (3.83 km)



### (8) Carry straight on taking path through bushes at forest road junction

After descending for about 270 m, you arrive at the terminus of a forest road. DO NOT TURN RIGHT HERE TO FOLLOW THE FOREST ROAD!. Instead, carry on downhill, on an initially indistinct path through bushes, as the path you were on continues downhill, with the forestry plantation still on your right side and a dry-stone wall close on your left side. (4.1 km)



### (9) Left through gate posts onto heather path

In a further 240 m, walking downhill with the dry-stone wall close on your left side, turn sharp left through a couple of fence posts, at a gap in the dry-stone wall, onto a path through heather and bracken going in a generally southern direction. This narrow path through the heather and bracken will take you around the hillside for a little more than 1 km. In summer months it may be a little overgrown and indistinct in places but easy enough to follow. (4.34 km)



### (10) Right onto quarry access road

After following the hillside path through heather and bracken for 1.15 km, and passing a field on your right side in the final section, you will arrive back at the y-junction (near the sand quarries) that you encountered at Waypoint 6 on the outward section of the walk and, very soon after that, you will arrive back at the rough quarry access road. Turn right here to re-trace your steps back to the Lord's Throat minor road. At the road, turn right to re-trace your steps along the road, back in the direction of Waypoint 3, earlier on the route. (5.49 km)



### (11) Go right - up Cothiemuir Woodland Burials access road

In 800 m, go right off the Lord's Throat road and up the Cothiemuir Woodland Burials access road, which soon bends left and gently ascends to a car-parking area where there is an information sign and a box for the distribution of leaflets about the woodlands burial facility. (6.29 km)



## (12) From Cothiemuir car-park follow path into woodland

(57.26543; -2.63587) <https://w3w.co/betrayal.mandates.garlic>  
In 160 m, at the Cothiemuir car-park, and with your back to Turf Hill, near the information point, follow a narrow path into the woodland. As at May 2022, the path ahead is blocked by large fallen trees. It is therefore necessary to go around the fallen trees. So, turn immediately right for a short section, then left to enter into the woodland. Pick your way over and around the trees to gradually make your way slowly leftwards back to the original path. In about 100 m, where the path is now clear of large fallen trees, follow the path as it turns left on the short approach route to the Cothiemuir Stone Circle which you will soon encounter, ahead of you. (6.45 km)



## (13) Cothiemuir Hill Stone Circle

In 300 m you will arrive at a clearing where there is the impressive Cothiemuir Hill Stone Circle\*. When you are ready to move on, carry on taking the woodland path in the same direction as before. Follow this narrow path as it gently descends through the trees towards the Lord's Throat minor road. (6.75 km)

*\*Note: The Cothiemuir Hill Stone Circle is also known as the Devil's Hoofmark. Although stones are missing around the circle, the recumbent stone and flankers are particularly impressive. The recumbent is thought to weigh over 20 tons and the flankers are around 9 ft tall. The circle is believed to have been built over 4,000 years ago on the site of an earlier burial cairn with a central chamber (the covering stone still lies in the centre of the circle). For more information, see: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/18055/cothiemuir-wood>*



## (14) Cross Lord's Throat Road onto woodland path

In 130 m, or so, from the stone circle, cross the Lord's Throat Road and join a woodland path on the other side of the road. Follow this path into a belt of trees, with fields, now, on both sides. In about 240 m, the path through the belt of trees veers right as it approaches a rough estate road. (6.88 km)



## (15) Go right onto estate access road

In 340 m, go right where the path you are on meets a rough estate access road. Now follow this road, crossing the Burn of Keig, back to your start-point. (7.22 km)

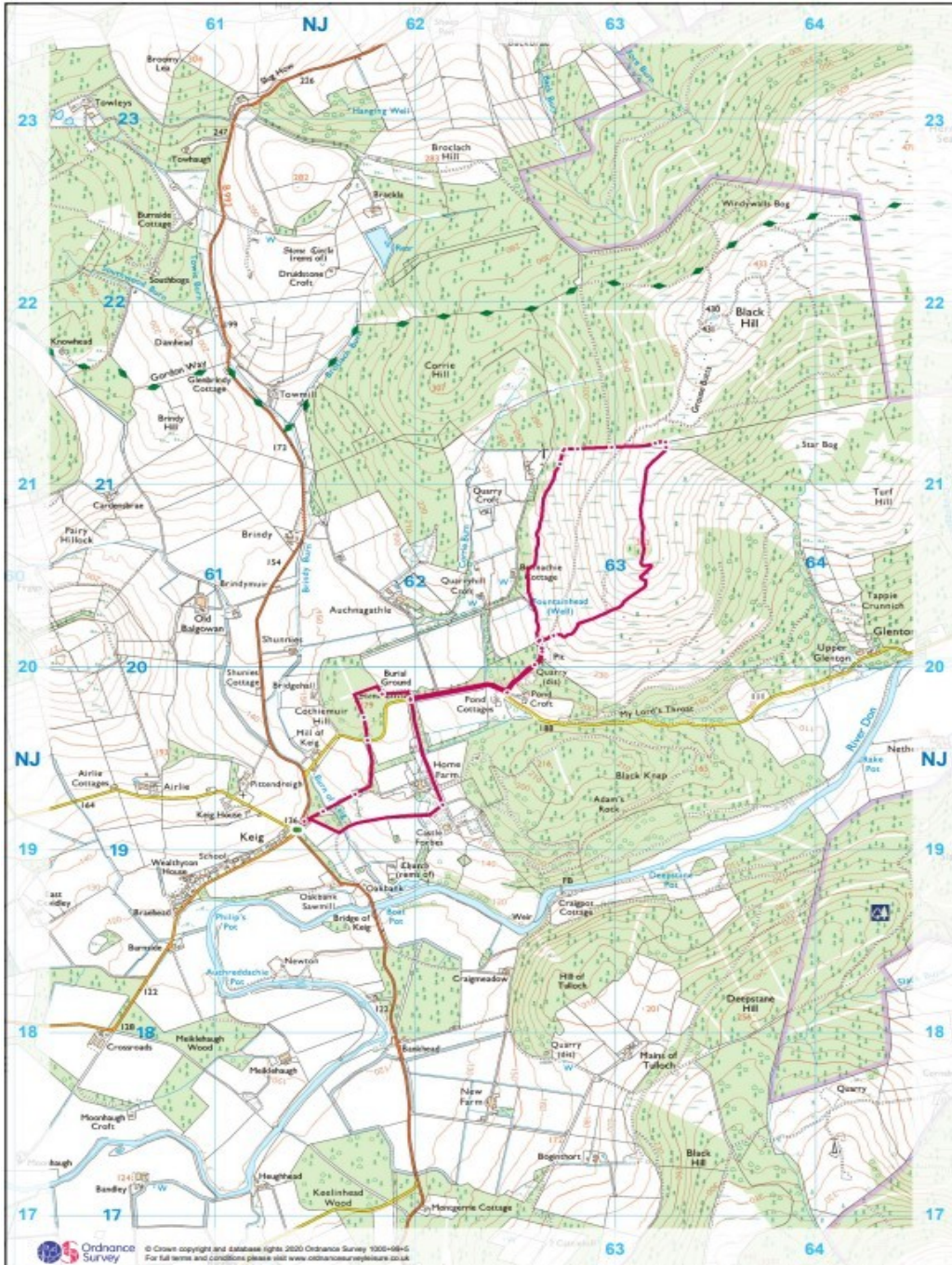


## (16) Finish walk back at entrance to Castle Forbes Estate

In 360 m, you will have arrived at your walk start-point at the entrance to Castle Forbes Estate on the outskirts of Keig.  
(7.58 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 Alltrials](#)

[Access Walk on Wikiloc](#)