

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Muir of Alford-Breda-River Don Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

An easy rural ramble with very limited ascent. The highlights on the route are – the river path along the scenic valley of the River Don and the wider vistas to the Bennachie and Menaway Hills from the mid-point at Auchintoul Farm. As ever, some historical interest too!

Duration: 2 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: No public transport links close to the walk start/end point. Nearest bus service to Alford.

A small parking area near the roadside outside the old church at the walk start.

Length: 6.04 km / 3.78 mi

Height Gain: 78 meter **Height Loss:** 78 meter

Max Height: 193 meter **Min Height:** 144 meter

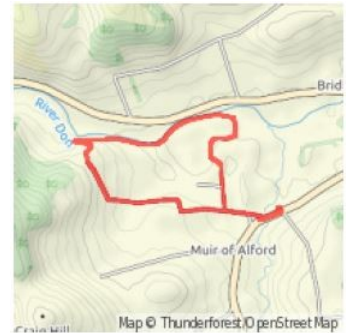
Surface: Moderate. A mix of tarred surfaces, hard-surfaced rough roads and rough paths. The riverside path is through long grass in parts and will be wet after rain, particularly in the summer months. Not suitable for off-road mobility scooters due to narrow grassy paths, and a steel barrier across the track at Waypoint 9.

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

Difficulty: Easy.

Dog Friendly: Yes, on lead on public roads and near farm animals.

Refreshments: Options in Alford.



Description

This is a very gentle and pleasant rural walk in the Howe of Alford with a particularly scenic section along the River Don, where Lord Arthur's Hill dominates on the north side of the river, and the Coiliochbar Hill on the south. Sixty-two miles long, the River Don rises in the shadow of Glen Avon and follows a sinuous route eastwards through Strathdon, the Howe of Alford, and the Garioch, before entering the North Sea just north of Old Aberdeen. In Roman times the river was recorded by Ptolemy of Alexandria as "Devona", meaning 'goddess'. The walk starts at the now unused Auld West Kirk near Muir of Alford on the A980 road. It is believed that there has been a place of Christian worship on this site since the late 12th C. The church was dedicated to St Andrew, and was given by Gillechrist, Earl of Mar, to the Priory of Monymusk. The present church was built in 1804. In the graveyard there are some interesting old stones from the 17th and 18th C, although most are from the 19th. The graves of early botanist John Duncan, and Alford-born poet Charles Murray are here. On the western exterior there are several good wall monuments including an armorial to George Melville (1678), and the Forbes of Balfluig mural monument (1725?). Before reaching the River Don path, the route passes close to Breda House, a red granite mansion in the Scots baronial style which is dominated by a three-storey main block with a circular conical-roofed tower. It was built in 1894, designed by the notable Aberdeen architect, Marshall Mackenzie, and was used as an auxiliary hospital in the First World War. In trees, close to the River Don path, but surrounded, now, by a cultivated field, is the Breda Mausoleum, built in 1831. This slab roofed single storey edifice was built for Andrew Farquharson, Laird of the Breda estate. There are some extremely fine views east towards the Bennachie and Mennaway Hills from the Auchintoul hillside at the turning point on the route. See also:



<https://canmore.org.uk/site/17520/mansefield-alford-parish-west-church>

<https://canmore.org.uk/site/76542/breda>

Waypoints

(1) Start walk at the Auld West Church

(57.23338; -2.74020)

<https://w3w.co/orders.chuckling.curl> NJ5540816091

The walk starts at the Auld West Kirk just outside Alford, near Muir of Alford, on the A980 road. We suggest you take a little time to check out the church* and graveyard which has some interesting old stones and wall monuments. When you are ready, leave the church-yard and walk right, along verge of the A980 main road. Take especial care when crossing the narrow bridge over the Leochal Burn. You are looking for the first turn-off on your right after the bridge.

**Note: the Auld West Kirk near Muir of Alford on the A980 road is no longer used as a church. It is believed that there has been a place of Christian worship on this site since the late 12th C. The church was dedicated to St Andrew, and was given by Gillechrist, Earl of Mar, to the Priory of Monymusk. The present church was built in 1804. In the graveyard there are some interesting old stones from the 17th and 18th C, although most are from the 19th. The graves of early botanist John Duncan, and Alford-born poet Charles Murray are here. On the western exterior there are several good wall monuments including an armorial to George Melville (1678), and the Forbes of Balfluig mural monument (1725?).*



(2) Take a right turn off main road

(57.23257; -2.74363)

After 350 m (including church-yard), take a right turn off the main road past a house on your left. Within 50 m, or less, turn left to follow a lane that then joins a minor tarred access road. (350 m)



(3) Go right down the Breda access road

(57.23339; -2.74916)

In another 400 m, go right down one of the access roads to Breda House, soon passing modern houses to right and left. (744 m)



(4) Veer left into trees away from Breda House

(57.23728; -2.74972)

In 450 m, just after the steading conversion for Breda Home Farm on your left, veer left to follow a rough road into the trees away from Breda House*, which you can see ahead of you down a private, gated access drive. Keep following the rough road which soon breaks through the trees, with a large field on your left, as it starts to curve around towards the rear of Breda House. A few hundred metres away, on your left you will see a fenced rectangular "island" within the field, with a building within the trees. This is the Breda Mausoleum**. (1.2 km)



**Note: Breda House is a red granite mansion in the Scots baronial style which is dominated by a three-storey main block with a circular conical-roofed tower. It was built in 1894, designed by the notable Aberdeen architect, Marshall Mackenzie, and was used as an auxiliary hospital in the First World War.*

***Note: the Breda Mausoleum was built in 1831. This slab roofed single storey edifice was built for Andrew Farquharson, Laird of the Breda estate.*

(5) Carry on along field verge

(57.23954; -2.75053)

After 300 m, or so, the hard-surfaced old road going part way around Breda House gives way to a rougher and grassier field access road. Keep going towards the trees ahead and follow the rough road as it swings left into the belt of trees. (1.5 km)



(6) Go left onto path through the trees

(57.24031; -2.74738)

In 300 m, just before the rough road emerges out of the belt of trees at a field, go left onto a narrow path through the trees, walking toward the River Don. When the path emerges out of the trees, turn right to soon reach the riverside path. (1.8 km)



(7) Take path going west alongside the River Don

(57.24161; -2.75021)

In 200 m, or so, you will have arrived at the riverside path. Go west, along the banks of the River Don, admiring the great views*. (2.0 km)

**Note: this is a particularly scenic section along the River Don, where the heather-topped Lord Arthur's Hill dominates on the north side of the river, and the (largely) forested mass of Coilliochbar Hill on the south, rising above Breda Hill directly ahead of you.*



(8) Carry on walking by the riverside

(57.23908; -2.75957)

In 700 m, where the riverside meets a path emerging from a belt of mature broadleaf trees, carry on taking the riverside path. Eventually, this path veers slightly away from the riverside to gently climb into an area of conifer woodland, with views down to the river below. (2.7 km)



(9) Sharp left onto woodland path after barriers

(57.23931; -2.77270)

In 800 m, with a small plantation of conifer woodland now on your left side, above the river, pass over a low steel barrier over the track, and almost immediately go left (where there is a sign indicating the path avoids the curtilage of Auchintoul Farm), then almost immediately, in 15 m, or so, at a fence strainer post, take a sharp left to follow a grassy path through a patch of broadleaf woodland, with the conifer plantation now close on your left side. The path goes gently uphill and soon emerges at an open area with the conifer trees on your left and a field ahead of you. Turn right here to continue following a track ascending to the tarred access road at the gates of Auchintoul Farm. Turn left on meeting this quiet access road to commence the return leg of your walk. In about 1.6 km you will arrive at the houses you encountered when you turned right at Waypoint 3 to head in the direction of Breda House and the River Don. Carry on here, now re-tracing your steps to the start point at the old church. (3.5 km)



(10) Finish walk back at the Auld West Kirk

(57.23339; -2.74014)

After 2.5 km from Auchintoul Farm you will have arrived back at your start-point at the Auld West Kirk. (6.0 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](#)