

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Spital Cottage-Glen Dye-Charr Circuit (Aberdeenshire)

Route Summary

The outward route follows the scenic Water of Dye upstream through the glen to its meeting point with the Water of Charr, passing the ruins of human habitation and subsistence farming at various points. The Charr Bothy provides a pleasant resting point before the return loop.

Duration: 3.5 hours.



Route Overview

Duration: 3.5 hours.

Transport/Parking: No public transport nearby. Park in a small rough-surfaced lay-by on the south side of the B974 road, just above the ruin of Spital Cottage. This location is 2.7 km south on the B974 from the main Glen Dye walkers car-park. See Waypoint 1 for other options.

Length: 10.260 km / 6.41 mi

Height Gain: 213 meter. **Height Loss:** 213 meter.

Max Height: 299 meter. **Min Height:** 213 meter.

Surface: Moderate. A very small section on the B974 road. On good land-rover tracks thereafter.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

Dog Friendly: Yes, must be on lead when passing through sheep pasture, and on the busy public road.

Refreshments: Options in Banchory, Finzean and Fettercairn.



Description

This is a very satisfying low hill-walk into lonely Glen Dye, on the Glen Dye Estate, accompanied by the scenic twists and turns of the fast-running Water of Dye for most of the route. The Glen is neighbour to one of the most popular hills in lower Deeside, Clachnaben, whose iconic granite tor is visible at various points on our route. From the start, and at various points thereafter, there are clear reminders that the Glen was once a busy place. On the green lower slopes of the heathery tops, small communities grew crops, dried their corn in stone kilns, and kept farm animals where hill sheep now graze around the ruins of their homesteads. The evidence of a rig and furrow cultivation system is especially striking, as the earth has never been turned by a modern plough. The memorable return point of the walk is



the atmospheric grassy headland at Charr where the Waters of Dye and Charr meet, with the Brocky Burn, tumbling past the Charr Bothy, also adding to the clear and rushing confluence. The Bothy, well maintained by the Mountain Bothies Association, sits on a sunny hillside providing a place of shelter for walkers. The archaeological record shows that, on either side of the Dye, Charr was once a settlement with field enclosures and two "longhouses" (in colloquial Scots, the archetypical "*but and ben*" building with people and animals under one roof). For us, birds made for some lasting memories on this walk. At Charr Bothy we were delighted to make the brief acquaintance of a Reed Bunting, our first encounter with this bird, who sang their song to us from the apex of the Bothy roof. A little later, as we headed back on the upper section of the loop, above the ruins of the extensive "clachan" at Waterhead, we were repeatedly dive-bombed by a pair of nesting Lapwings. And, as we descended towards the Water of Dye at Nettyhaugh, on the road that takes you to Glendye Lodge, we attracted the noisy interest of a Stone Chat, our first ever sighting of this bird.

Waypoints

(1) Start walk from lay-by above Spital Cottage

(56.95098; -2.58208) <https://w3w.co/lunged.thigh.processes>

The walk starts from a small rough-surfaced lay-by on the south side of the B974 road, just above the ruin of Spital Cottage*. With your back to the ruin, turn right and walk downhill on the verge of the B974 road**, soon crossing the narrow Spital Burn bridge (take care for passing traffic!), and walking up the incline on the other side towards the opening to a Glen Dye Estate access road on your right.

* Note: This location is 2.7 km south on the B974 from the main Glen Dye walkers car-park, much used by those taking the very popular Clachanaben hiking route, and 50 m west from the Spital Burn bridge on the B974. Parking alternatives as follows: 1) a rough lay-by on the other side of the road, on the other side of the Spital Burn Bridge, between Waypoint 1 and Waypoint 2; 2) at the access road opening (Waypoint 2), where vehicle parking is possible on either side of the wide road opening; 3) there is a small rough-surfaced car-park at Waypoint 3, just before the bridge over the Water of Dye.

** Note: The B974 Old Military Road between Strachan and Fettercairn, over the Cairn o'Mount can be busy. Take care walking along it.



(2) Right off B974 road down track to Glen Dye

(56.95012; -2.58095) <https://w3w.co/plants.bottom.signature>

In 160 m, turn right and walk down a rough access road for Glen Dye. (158 m)



(3) Through gates-cross bridge-then turn left

(56.94942; -2.58460) <https://w3w.co/bleak.scorecard.landlords>

In 250 m, go through the pedestrian gate, cross the bridge and then turn left to follow the rough estate road, with the Water of Dye on your left side. You are very likely to encounter hill sheep/lambs in this section of the route. Please ensure dogs are on lead. As you proceed along this 3.1 km section, look out for the abundant evidence of a rural community that lived and worked the land in Glen Dye in former times before the glen was de-populated. Watch out, in particular, for stone field enclosures, the scant remains of ruined buildings, and dry-stone kilns (for drying corn). See the description at Waypoint 8 for more information. (395 m)



(4) Right and uphill at reservoir

(56.94067; -2.62629) <https://w3w.co/helpfully.tanks.merit>

After 3.1 km, with the small Scottish Water reservoir on your left side, follow the road as it bends right and uphill. (3.5 km)



(5) Left at t-junction to divert to Charr Bothy

(56.94148; -2.62736) <https://w3w.co/toads.glares.shredding>

In 200 m, or so, at a t-junction, go left to divert to Charr Bothy. (3.7 km)



(6) Charr Bothy

(56.93759; -2.63315) <https://w3w.co/shift.gave.mammoths>

In 600 m, you will have arrived at Charr Bothy*. After checking the place out, and signing the visitors book, if you wish, head downhill past an outbuilding then veer right off the road and past an enclosed weather station towards the confluence of the Water of Dye with the Water of Charr. (4.3 km)

**Note: The Charr Bothy is maintained by the Mountain Bothies Association (MBA). The MBA was '... Founded in 1965, the Mountain Bothies Association exists to maintain remote buildings for which the owner has little or no use, yet remain important to walkers and others who make use of the shelter that they provide.'*

See: <https://www.mountainbothies.org.uk/bothies/eastern-highlands/charr/>



(7) Confluence of Dye Water and Charr Water

(56.93654; -2.63325) <https://w3w.co/little.partner.warthog>

In 100 m, or so, you will have arrived at the scenic spot where the Water of Dye and Water of Charr meet, with the Brocky Burn also running in here, too. When you are ready, re-trace your steps back to the Charr Bothy, passing some of the ruins of the long-abandoned Charr clachan*. At the back of the Bothy, re-trace your steps along the rough estate road towards Waypoint 5. (4.4 km)



* Note: a 'clachan' is small rural hamlet in Scotland, typically associated with largely subsistence agriculture, and now typically abandoned and in a ruinous state. The Aberdeenshire Historic Environment Record (HER) database has this to say about the abandoned Charr settlement: 'Remains of depopulated settlement. Three enclosures and one longhouse lie north of the river. One longhouse, two enclosures and two areas of rig and furrow lie on the south side of the river.'

See: <https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/smrpub/master/detail.aspx?refno=NO68SW0002&tab=maps>

(8) Carry straight on - on higher track

(56.94152; -2.62760) <https://w3w.co/appraised.clocked.mouths>

In 800 m, or so, you will have arrived back at the junction you met at Waypoint 5. Now carry straight on, taking this higher track as it starts to veer away from the Water of Dye, now far below you, and climbs in a broadly NE direction over the shoulder of Gauns Hill. In the first section, look out for the evidence of (now ruinous) rural settlement called Waterhead* and associated rig and furrow agriculture on the hillside below you on your right side. (5.2 km)



*Note: The Aberdeenshire Historic Environment Record (HER) database has this to say about Waterhead: 'Remains of depopulated settlement, consisting of six longhouses and rig and furrow in nine enclosures, covering a total area of circa 15 ha. One of the longhouses just north of the present track appears to have been deserted in the 19th Century, although earlier turf footings can be seen underlying the structure. A small enclosure backs on to the longhouse with pronounced spade ridges or lazy beds. In some cases the rig and furrow are similar to lynchets in dimension. A desk-based assessment and field survey was carried out over this site in 1994 by CFA in advance of proposed construction of a reservoir (centred on NO 6207 8343). This recorded the known remains and identified a number of additional features of the depopulated settlement (although no finds of archaeological significance were recorded in the area of the proposed reservoir which lies in the southwest part of the area). The enclosures are all of drystone construction, c. 0.5m wide and 1.2m high. Most relate to delineation of field systems containing rig and furrow although some are more likely to relate to stock control. Three stretches of hollow-ways were located, one of which appears to associated with access to the settlement, enclosures and possibly the kiln to the east of the area. Four small clearance cairns were identified, and these appear to relate to areas of rig and furrow. Two upstanding and well preserved kilns were of drystone construction, built into east facing slopes. The survey recorded a total of 11 longhouses. The additional two lie to the north of the previously known remains and their boat-shaped form suggests that they may be of earlier date.'

See: <https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/smrpub/master/detail.aspx?tab=main&refno=NO68SW0001>

(9) Sharp right for return track

(56.95757; -2.58811) <https://w3w.co/represent.stumble.soup>

After 3.2 km, having passed between Gauns Hill and Hill of Duclash, you will have descended to a forked junction. Turn sharp right here, heading back to where you crossed the Water of Dye at Waypoint 3 on your outward journey. The Water of Dye is now on your left side again, some way below the estate road you are on. When you reach the bridge at Waypoint 3, turn left to cross it, go through the gate and re-trace your steps back up to the B974 road and your start-point. (8.4 km)



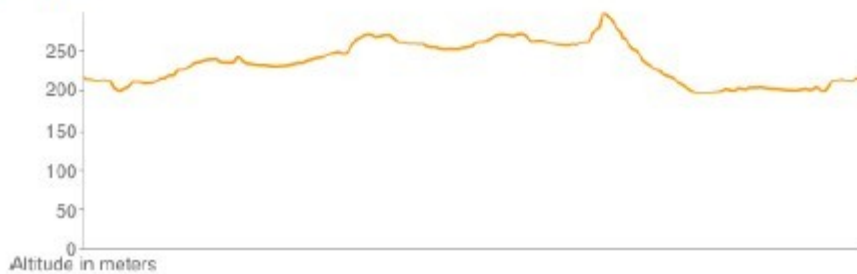
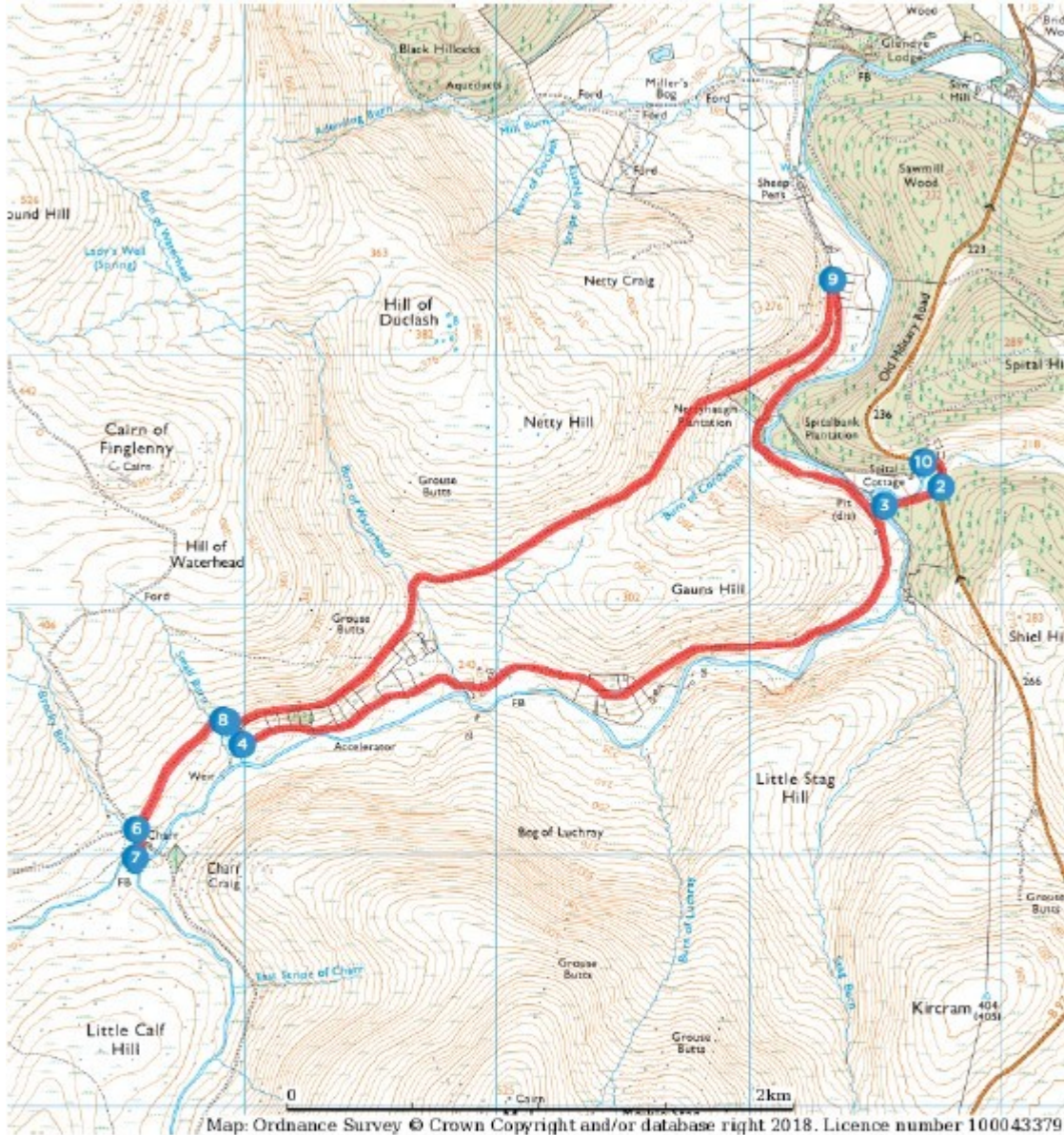
(10) End walk back at lay-by above Spital Cottage

(56.95100; -2.58215) <https://w3w.co/lunged.thigh.processes>

In 1.9 km, you will have returned to your start point at the lay-by above Spital Cottage (10.3 km)



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 Outdooractive](#)

[Access Walk on Wikiloc](#)