

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Cromarty-Gallow Hill-South Sutor Circuit (Highland)

Route Summary

This route takes in both town and country environments, with many historic associations and fine views. The Black Isle promontory offers a special mix of rolling fertile farmland, with cliffs on the south side, and a large fjord-like sheltered sea-water inlet on the north side.

Duration: 3.5 hours



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Stagecoach bus service between Inverness and Cromarty. See timetable. Small free public car-park at the walk start/end point.

Length: 8.750 km / 5.47 mi

Height Gain: 240 meter. **Height Loss:** 240 meter.

Max Height: 122 meter. **Min Height:** 0 meter.

Surface: Moderate. A mix of minor roads, field and woodland paths.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

Dog Friendly: Yes, but on lead in Cromarty and in farmland with livestock between Waypoints 4 and 8.

Refreshments: Options in Cromarty.



Description

This is a varied and enjoyable circular walk from the historic and picturesque little town of Cromarty in the Black Isle area of northern Scotland to the high headland known as the South Sutor. The town nestles on the shore of the sheltered waters of the Cromarty Firth, a haven to British battle fleets in both World Wars, and now to the North Sea oil industry. The initial ascent reaches Mains of Cromarty Farm before crossing the watershed of the Black Isle promontory and beginning a gentle descent to the cliffs on its southern shore where there are fine views over the Moray Firth across a wide panorama from Burghead to Inverness. The route then takes a turn to the north-east, crossing rough pasture on the shoulder of Gallow Hill to reach a high point at the South Sutor (125 m). The two headlands at the entrance to the Firth, in the supposed shape of massive shoemaker's lasts, are associated with two mythical giant sutors (cobblers) who tossed tools to each other across the opening to the open sea. The return leg on the route then descends quite steeply through woodland on an old path known as "The 100 Steps" before exploring the interesting architectural features in the mostly 18thC centre of the town. The town of Cromarty dates back at least 700 years, with a history linked both to the fertile soil of the Black Isle and mercantile trade with Scandinavia, the Low Countries, Portugal and the Mediterranean. George Ross of Cromarty acquired the Cromarty estate in the 1760s building a brewery, the harbour, the fishing station and ice house, the fine courthouse, the Gaelic Chapel, and Cromarty House. However, Cromarty's most celebrated figure is undoubtedly Hugh Miller (1802-1856) who grew up in poverty, becoming a largely self-taught polymath, rising from artisan stonemason to ground-breaking world-renown geologist, colourful local author, radical newspaper editor in Edinburgh, and passionate promoter of the democratic Christian values that underpinned the breakaway Free Church of Scotland. For more information, see: <https://tinyurl.com/yvfpkpu> and <https://tinyurl.com/y6netmrf>.



Waypoints

(1) Start walk at the Hugh Miller information board

(57.68157; -4.03214) <https://w3w.co/task.middle.opts>

The walk starts from the small public Links car-park off Forsyth Place, near the waterfront in Cromarty. After checking out the Hugh Miller* information board, turn left and follow Shore Street in a SE direction, with the sea on your left side and houses on your right side. As the road veers away from the seafront go left at the junction with Burnside Place to follow the road onto Miller Road.

**Note: Cromarty is rightly proud of its famous son, Hugh Miller - '... Hugh Miller (1802-1856) has been acclaimed as 'the supreme poet of geology' and called 'the David Attenborough of his day.' He gained such accolades not only as a pioneer of the science in its first heyday, but because he wrote about everything he saw and discovered in such gloriously luminous terms. He could lyrically evoke our planet's passage through deep time, while also describing his fossils with homely metaphors and comparisons with the familiar everyday. He achieved heroic status in his own time and ever since because he grew up in poverty, and achieved so much as a largely self-taught polymath, rising from jobbing stonemason to national newspaper editor and literary lion. His life brought triumphs in science and literature, in journalism, and for his evangelical Christian faith. But it was also beset with tragedy and conflict, and he would die by his own hand at the age of only 54 ...'. See: <https://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk/hugh-miller-a-brief-history.asp>*



(2) Info board where Miller Road bends right onto Causeway Road

(57.67906; -4.02543) <https://w3w.co/inhaler.assures.freezers>

In just over 500 m from the start, pass an information board on your left as you turn sharply right onto Causeway Road. Keep going as the road start to ascend, passing the unusual tunnelled entrance to Cromarty House* on your right (the St Regulus 'Pirates' Graveyard* is on your left here - we missed it!). Keep going uphill on what is now the South Sutor minor road. (521 m)

**Note: See:*

<https://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk/index.asp?pageid=517590>



(3) Cross South Sutor Road onto farm track

(57.67181; -4.02316) <https://w3w.co/mats.blending.eyeliner>

In 900 m you will ascend to a x-roads junction near to Cromarty Mains Farm. Go straight across the x-roads to take the rough farm road ahead of you. A walks signpost indicates this is the way to 'McFarquhar's Bed'. In about 150 m, the rough farm road bends briefly right then left to carry on in a southerly direction, passing some modern houses on your right side and a large farm building on your left side. (1.4 km)



(4) Through pedestrian gate and straight on

(57.66876; -4.02034) <https://w3w.co/mobile.beads.motel>

In 400 m, after passing a large farm building on your left side, go through the pedestrian gate, ensuring you secure it properly behind you. Carry on taking the rough road along the edge of the field (likely to have sheep in it, so ensure dogs are on lead). In about 400 m you will pass through another pedestrian gate and keep going straight ahead on a narrow path through an open patch/avenue of broadleaf trees, now descending towards the northern clifftop of the Black Isle, with the Moray Firth below you. (1.8 km)



(5) Sharp left away from path to McFarquhar's Bed

(57.66321; -4.01356)

<https://w3w.co/remission.crackling.forgets>

In 800 m from Waypoint 4, having gone through the sheep field, then through a gate, and then proceeded downhill on a narrow grassy path through an open avenue of trees, you will arrive at an indistinct t-junction. You have the option here to go right to follow a path to the clifftop, then a path steeply descending to the seashore at a place called McFarquhar's Bed*. Our route, however, goes left here to head in the direction of the South Sutor. At first, weave your way over and under a fallen tree, then follow the path NE along a field edge with trees, initially, on your right side. At the far end of the field, follow the narrow grassy path as it bends left around the field edge for a short distance. You are looking for a stile ahead of you at this point. (2.6 km)



**Note: McFarquhar's Bed refers to caves where a smuggler known as McFarquhar reputedly lived. Here, there is '... a spectacular natural stone arch, and beside it an open-sided grass-topped stone outcrop looking like a giant whale's jaw. To the left are the large caves named for the mysterious MacFarquhar. It is only known that he was a smuggler, but his exploits have been lost in the mists of time. [Hugh] Miller made these caverns famous as a sometime haunt of gypsies, whose freewheeling lifestyle he reported on to the Inverness Courier in 1829 (A Noble Smuggler And Other Stories, ed Martin Gostwick)....'. See: <https://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk/index.asp?pageid=517590>*

(6) Over stile and follow path through field

(57.66731; -4.00795) <https://w3w.co/puzzle.stems.regaining>

In 600 m, cross over the stile and follow the path through the pasture field, with gorse bushes fairly close on your left side. There are good views south and west, over the Moray Firth. In about 400 m you will arrive at a field gate. Go through the gate, closing it carefully behind you, and keep following the path through rough ground in a NE direction, heading for another stile. (3.2 km)



(7) Over stile and follow grassy path

(57.67348; -4.00216) <https://w3w.co/hires.started.years>

In 700 m, cross the fence ahead of you using the stile. Follow the path into an area of rough grass and open woodland. Soon, the main path you should take makes a fairly abrupt turn right while a more indistinct path carries on, veering slightly left. Having followed the path right keep going through the rough grassland and open trees. Abandoned old military buildings start appearing on your right side as you ascend gently towards a gate*. Go through the gate into the South Sutor car-park and turn left through the car-park, making for the metal bench at a viewpoint. (3.9 km)

**Note: Before going through the gate, you may wish to briefly deviate left to the highest point on the South Sutor for the outstanding views, which are said to extend over seven counties.*



(8) Bench and viewpoint over to North Sutor

(57.67812; -4.00085) <https://w3w.co/ivory.lengthen.large>

In 600 m, you will have arrived at the metal bench and viewpoint on the South Sutor*. Here, you have a good view over to the North Sutor and down to the channel giving entry to the sheltered Cromarty Firth**. When you are ready, walk back a short distance (to your right, when looking over the bench to the North Sutor) to the walks signpost. (4.5 km)

**Note: The South Sutor '... rises to a height of 125 metres (406 ft) and provides a spectacular view over seven counties. The channel below is at points over 46 metres (150 ft) deep. 'Sutor' is Scots for a shoemaker. There is a local legend that the two headlands, the North and South Sutor, are named after two giant shoemakers who shared their tools and threw them across from one side to the other ...' See: <http://www.rossandcromartyheritage.org/Community/Cromarty/History/Cromarty-History-A-Guide.aspx>*



***Note: the Cromarty Firth was of strategic military importance as a safe haven for the British Navy in both World Wars. See: <http://www.rossandcromartyheritage.org/Community/Cromarty/History/Archaeology.aspx>*

(9) Take path downhill through trees for Cromarty

(57.67787; -4.00021) <https://w3w.co/trucked.wand.journals>

After checking out the view of the North Sutor at the metal bench in the South Sutor car-park, walk back less than 50 m to the walks signpost. Now take the '100 Steps' path back to Cromarty that descends into the woodland. (4.6 km)



(10) Take right fork at y-junction

(57.67876; -4.00903) <https://w3w.co/seeing.sketches.beeline>
In 700 m, at a y-junction in the woodland, take the right fork and continue your descent through the trees. (5.3 km)



(11) Straight on - following coastal path

(57.67901; -4.01587) <https://w3w.co/clean.parading.sobbed>
In 500 m, having left the trees and now on the open coastal path, at a walks signpost carry straight on - following the coastal path towards Cromarty. Soon, you will pass an information board about the archaeological finds in the field on your left. (5.8 km)



(12) Turn right onto Miller Road at info board

(57.67903; -4.02549) <https://w3w.co/inhaler.assures.freezers>
In 600 m, you will again pass the information board you checked out earlier at Waypoint 2. Turn right here onto Miller Road and re-trace your steps to the junction with Burnside Place. (6.4 km)



(13) Left onto Burnside Place

(57.67931; -4.02797) <https://w3w.co/servicing.enclosing.anthems>
In 200 m, at a signpost, go left onto Burnside Place which soon bends right, passing the East Church (information board in the graveyard, as you enter it), to become Church Street. There are many old buildings in this area to appreciate as you stroll down the street. (6.6 km)



(14) Left up the Paye Road for Hugh Miller monument

(57.67991; -4.03041)

<https://w3w.co/somewhere.request.occupations>

In 200 m, by an ochre coloured old house on your left go up the cobbled Paye* road on your left. (6.8 km)

**Note: The Paye was '... the medieval main road from the countryside (French pays) into Cromarty, through which Kings Robert the Bruce and James IV passed during royal "progresses" over the north of the country ...'. See: <https://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk/index.asp?pageid=517584>*



(15) Right off Paye Road onto path to Hugh Miller monument

(57.67974; -4.03150) <https://w3w.co/crispier.summaries.central>

In about 70 m, turn right off the Paye road onto a signposted path through trees which soon bends left and uphill towards the Hugh Miller monument. (6.8 km)



(16) Hugh Miller monument

(57.67949; -4.03262) <https://w3w.co/summaries.pebble.violin>

In less than 100 m you will have arrived at the tall and impressive Hugh Miller monument*. After checking out the monument, return to the path and continue gently uphill, with trees on your right and a graveyard and ruined church on your left. (6.9 km)

**Note: It was erected, three years after his death, by public subscription in 1859.*



(17) Gaelic Chapel

(57.67907; -4.03366) <https://w3w.co/opened.president.starred>
In about 100 m you will pass the ruins of the Gaelic Chapel* on your left and enter the graveyard by the gate on your left. After checking out the church and graveyard, return to the path and re-trace your steps back to the Paye road and Church Street, where you turn left to carry on walking along Church Street, almost immediately passing the Hugh Miller Cottage and Hugh Miller Museum. (7.1 km)

**Note: Hugh Miller '... much praised its builder George Ross (1783) for erecting it, and creating much employment in the town, so that Gaels cleared from the glens could worship in their own language ...'. See: <https://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk/index.asp?pageid=517584>*



(18) Left onto High Street

(57.68110; -4.03284) <https://w3w.co/buzzer.brew.suffice>
In 500 m you will have reached the end of Church Street where you turn left onto High Street. In 120 m, turn right and cross High Street to go down Bank Street towards the harbour. (7.6 km)



(19) Cromarty Harbour

(57.68270; -4.03780) <https://w3w.co/collapsed.ghosts.panel>
In 400 m, you will have arrived at picturesque Cromarty Harbour where you may wish to check out the piers and the views. There are likely to be many oil and gas industry platforms and rigs in view moored near the harbour and in the wider Cromarty Firth*. They are 'resting' in the sheltered waters, some long term, between contracts. When you are ready, with your back to the harbour, walk left, passing the lighthouse station buildings (now an Aberdeen University out-station) on your right. Check out the three information boards before proceeding past the Nigg Ferry pier and veering right to pass the Cromarty Cinema on your left as you approach the grassy links area by the shore. (8.0 km)

**Note: See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cromarty_Firth*



(20) Emigrant's Stone

(57.68310; -4.03430) <https://w3w.co/joys.sheet.influencing>

In less than 500 m from the harbour, veer left towards the shoreline at the grassy links park to check out the Emigrants Stone* and the view of the mouth of the Cromarty Firth, between the two Sutors. When you are ready, continue heading over the grass towards your walk start-point at the Forsyth Place car-park. (8.5 km)

**Note: This modern standing stone was erected as part of Hugh Miller's Bicentenary Celebrations in 2002 - '... It bears his words describing the departure of one emigration ship, the Cleopatra, and the names of more than 20 other ships which carried thousands of emigrants to Canada ...'. See:*

<https://www.thefriendsofhughmiller.org.uk/index.asp?pageid=517584>



(21) Finish walk back at car-park

(57.68159; -4.03222) <https://w3w.co/task.middle.opts>

In 300 m you will have returned to your walk start-point at the Forsyth Place car-park. (8.8 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](#)

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