

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Burghead-Cummingston-Clarkly Hill Circuit (Moray)

Route Summary

Open views and points of interest characterise this varied coastal walk which, alongside the expected seaside walking, features an impressive and historically interesting headland. Although of very modest height, Clarkly Hill, above Cummingston, provides a gentle ascent and great views. The final section provides a taste of coastal pine forest, and an expansive sandy beach at Burghead Bay.

Duration: 3.25 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Stagecoach bus services. Check timetables. There is a free car-park at the walk start-point.

Length: 8.26 km / 5.13 mi **Height Gain/Loss:** 116 meter.

Max Height: 67 meter. **Min Height:** 4 meter.

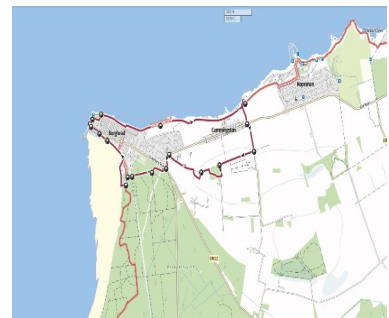
Surface: Moderate. Good tracks and paths, tared surfaces.. Not suitable for off-road mobility scooters due to steps and kissing gates.

Difficulty: Medium.

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

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

Refreshments: Options in Burghead.



Description

This is a pleasant coastal walk from the harbour area in Burghead, which still supports a small fishing fleet (mostly for prawns). The route at first climbs onto the headland of the promontory on which the village is built, where there is a fine viewpoint and interesting visitor centre. This position also provides the best view of what little is visible of a massive Pictish fort. There then follows an enjoyable section along the Moray Coastal Trail, mostly on the track of a long-disused railway line. Mid-way, we pass St. Aethan's Well, possibly dating back to Pictish times. The well, whose waters are ascribed healing and medicinal qualities, was recently rediscovered and repaired by the local community. The route then rises to the edge of



the little roadside community of Cummingston, now closely wedged between the modern boundaries of Burghead and Hopeman. We then gently ascend along the ridge of Clarkly Hill, supporting high radio masts, and despite its humble elevation, providing wonderful views towards sea and land. With clear visibility, the eastern hills of northern Scotland make for a satisfying long-distance vista. If you are fortunate, you will pick out the pyramid shape of Morven in faraway Caithness. Our route then descends to take in a corner of the mature Roseisle pine forest before breaking out onto the golden sands of Burghead Bay for a short return section on the beach. Burghead Fort was a Pictish promontory fort on the site now occupied by much of the modern settlement of Burghead. It was one of the earliest power centres of the Picts, and was three times the size of any other enclosed site in early medieval Scotland. The fort was probably the main centre of the Pictish kingdom of Fortriu, from the 4th to the 9th centuries. The fort area is now famous for the "Burning of the Clavie", a winter fire festival unique to Burghead (locally known as "The "Broch"). Every 11th January, the flaming Clavie (a barrel full of staves) is carried round the town providing a popular spectacle.

Waypoints

(1) Start the walk at the Station Road car-park

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Start the walk at the small car-park off Station Road, close to the harbour. There is an information board about Burghead at the south end of the car-park. After checking out the information, with your back to the information board, walk along Station Road towards the harbour. As you approach the harbour, veer right towards the harbour-master's little office.



(2) The Shetland Bus memorial

In 170 m, at the se side of the harbour-master's office sits the Shetland Bus* memorial and information board. After checking these out, continue in a NW seaward direction, passing high old granary buildings on your right, and with the harbour on your left. (170 m)

**Note: In 1942 and 1943 Burghead was used as a clandestine base to transport agents and supplies to Norway, and to help individuals escape from German occupation. The project was part of the "Shetland Bus" series of operations held mainly between the northern islands and Norway. One ill-fated voyage in 1943 ended when a boat leaving Burghead was struck by enemy fire and eight Norwegian men were killed. A propeller from the sunken vessel has been affixed to the memorial stone at the harbour as a poignant reminder of the men who died.*



(3) Right up lane granary building

In another 180 m, at the corner of the last old grain store buildings, by the inner harbour wall, go right up the short lane, then turn left, heading towards stone steps cut into the outer harbour wall. Climb these steps (there is a hand-rope to hang on to, for safety). At the top, start veering left towards an old coastguard house. (350 m)



(4) Left up steps

In about 80 m, before you arrive at the old coastguard house on your left just ahead of you, go left up a stone staircase onto a grassy area above the harbour. Then, walk a short distance towards the obvious, white-walled, rounded coastguard look-out building, with flag-pole atop. The old coastguard house is now on your right side. (430 m)



(5) Burghead Visitor Centre

In less than 80 m, you will have arrived at the former coastguard look-out, now the Burghead Visitor Centre*. If the centre is open, you will likely want to visit. On completing your visit, or if the Centre is closed, turn left and climb the exterior steps to the open look-out area where there are information boards and a viewfinder. There are great views in all directions, including, inland towards the village, over the rough ground and stone remains of the Burghead Pictish Fort**, over two levels. When you are ready, descend the steps, turn left and ascend on the path to the level of the look-out. Here, there is an old anchor and a sign commemorating local mariners lost at sea. Pass the anchor on your right and take the undulating path towards the village houses that overlooks the lower area of the former fort, passing a number of benches as you make your way to join Bath Street***. Upon descending to Bath Street, turn left and walk downhill in the direction of the sea. (520 m)



*Note: The site of the former coastguard lookout has now been adapted for use as a visitor centre. It takes visitors through the history of the area from about 400AD to the present time. It gives stunning views over the Moray Firth which can now be enjoyed in all weathers. There are information panels on the lives of the "herring lasses" who followed the herring fishing fleet from Barra to Lowestoft, and also information on the nearby Pictish fort site, and the natural history of the headland and the Moray Firth. As at August 2022, opening times are 12 noon – 4pm daily, Apr to the end of Sep. See: <http://www.burghead.com/visitor-centre/>

**Note: Burghead Fort was a Pictish promontory fort on the site now occupied by the small town of Burghead. It was one of the earliest power centres of the Picts and was three times the size of any other enclosed site in Early Medieval Scotland. The fort was probably the main centre of the Pictish Kingdom of Fortriu, flourishing like the kingdom itself from the 4th to the 9th centuries. Thanks to Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burghead_Fort

***Note: The Burning of the Clavie is a winter fire festival unique to Burghead, which welcomes the New Year. Every 11th January the flaming Clavie (a barrel full of staves) is carried round the town followed by a large crowd. The final destination of the Clavie is by Bath Street, on the Doorie Hill, part of the ramparts of the ancient Pictish fort. See: <http://www.burghead.com/clavie/>

(6) Right along coastal path

In 220 m, or so, from the Burghead Visitor Centre, at the foot of the Bath Street brae, now a rough road, turn right to take the coastal path, with houses on your right side, and the sea on your left. Keep going on this track for more than 1 km until the St Aethan's Well waypoint, passing the Burghead Maltings buildings, and gradually leaving the houses on your immediate right behind, (740 m)



(7) St Aethan's Well

In 1.13 km, divert to your right off the coastal path to check out St. Aethan's Well*. When you are ready, resume walking along the coastal (now a former, long abandoned, railway line). Keep going for another 1.69 km until the next waypoint. (1.87 km).

**Note: St. Aethan's Well possibly dates back to Pictish times. The well, whose waters are ascribed healing and medicinal qualities, was recently rediscovered and repaired. By the well there is a seat, an information sign, and a chained cup to give visitors access to its restorative powers. See: <https://www.northernscot.co.uk/news/liquid-gold-discovered-in-burghead-172601/>*



(8) Left for Clarkly Hill Circuit path

In 1.69 km, soon after passing under a stone bridge where there is a large board describing the coastal path, go left off the coastal path at a walks signpost, in the direction marked for the Clarkly Hill Circuit path. In about 40 m, divert briefly to your right for about 20 m to get a good view along the coast back towards Burghead. Then re-trace those 20 m, and veer slightly right to begin with as you follow the path over the stone railway bridge (you passed under this bridge a short time ago when on the coastal path). Cross the old bridge and carry on taking the rough path uphill towards the little village of Cummingston. (3.49 km)



(9) Left then right at main road

In 440 m, at a t-junction with the main B9040 road that runs through Cummingston, go left then, almost immediately, in less than 40 m, turn right to cross the road (with care) and ascend up the minor Clarkly Hill public road, looking out for a signed rough road going right, in about another 370 m. (3.92 km)



(10) Right off tarred road onto grassy track

In 420 m from meeting the B9040 road, turn right to take a rough road, between fields. There are great view of the Moray Firth below you, and, in the right conditions, the hills of Caithness, far away on the other side of the Firth. As you make your way towards small forestry plantation at the hill-top, ahead of you on your left side, you will pass an extensive farm area where pigs are reared. (4.34 km)



(11) Left through kissing gate into community woodland

In 650 m, go left through the kissing gate into the patch of community woodland called Lea Rigg. Follow the grassy path (may be slightly overgrown in summer) gently uphill on the eastern edge of the plantation, with the pigs' field on your left and the trees on your right side. In about 150m, at the corner of the plantation there is a good open view inland, to the south. Follow the path around the plantation as it goes right here, then veers slightly right to join a path through the middle of the woodland. Go left along this path, then veer right at a y-junction to arrive at the western edge of the woodland where you walk gently downhill to re-join the grassy road you were on earlier, passing through another kissing gate. Turn left here and continue along the grassy track. (4.99 km)



(12) Left through kissing gate to cross rough ground

In 570 m from Waypoint 11, and 125 m from the kissing gate you exited the woodland, go through another kissing gate on your left to follow a path through gorse bushes, crossing a small rough field to the entrance for an enclosed water tank/reservoir. Turn right there to follow the rough access road past Clarkly Cottages, and onwards, gently downhill towards the B9040 main road, passing the impressive, high radio transmitter masts on your right side. (5.57 km)



(13) Left down B9040 road

089 In 760 m, the rough access road you are on meets the B9040 main road at a t-junction. Cross the road with care, then turn left to walk downhill on the pavement, ignoring the waymarked sign in about 70 m that directs you right into Headland Rise. Keep going downhill until you reach the main B9089 access road for Burghead. (6.32 km)



(14) Cross B9013 road and take forest path

In 210 m, veer right to cross the B9013 St Aethan's Road to pass an ornamental wooden well (with flowers in summer). Pass the wooden well on your right and follow the narrow path into the trees. The path soon goes downhill, then winds left, then right, to cross a windbreak area before heading broadly in a westerly direction before bending a little towards the south-west*. (6.53 km)

**Note: it is possible to become disoriented as there are so many paths and rough roads in this corner of the Roseisle Forest. If you lose our route, your objective is Burghead Bay, about 900 m to your west from the B9013 road you have just crossed.*



(15) Go right along forest road

In 320 m, upon meeting a forest road, go right along the rough forest road. (6.85 km)



(16) Cross old railway line

In 360 m, cross the old railway line track and keep going, straight ahead as the path now dips down towards another forest road, passing a house on your right side. (7.22 km)



(17) Left along Burma Road

In 90 m, the path you are on meets a forest road signposted as the "Burma Road"*. Go left along this rough forest road for a short distance. (7.31 km)

**Note: This forest track is called the "Burma road", making reference to its construction by prisoners of war during WW2.*



(18) Right to cross sand dunes onto beach

In 120 m, go right at a gap in the trees onto a sandy path over a sand dune that takes you onto the beach at Burghead Bay. Turn right to walk along the beach, back towards Burghead. In about 250 m, walk up the old concrete slipway. At the top of the slipway, turn left immediately to follow the coastal path back in the direction of your start-point at the Station Road car-park. (7.42 km)



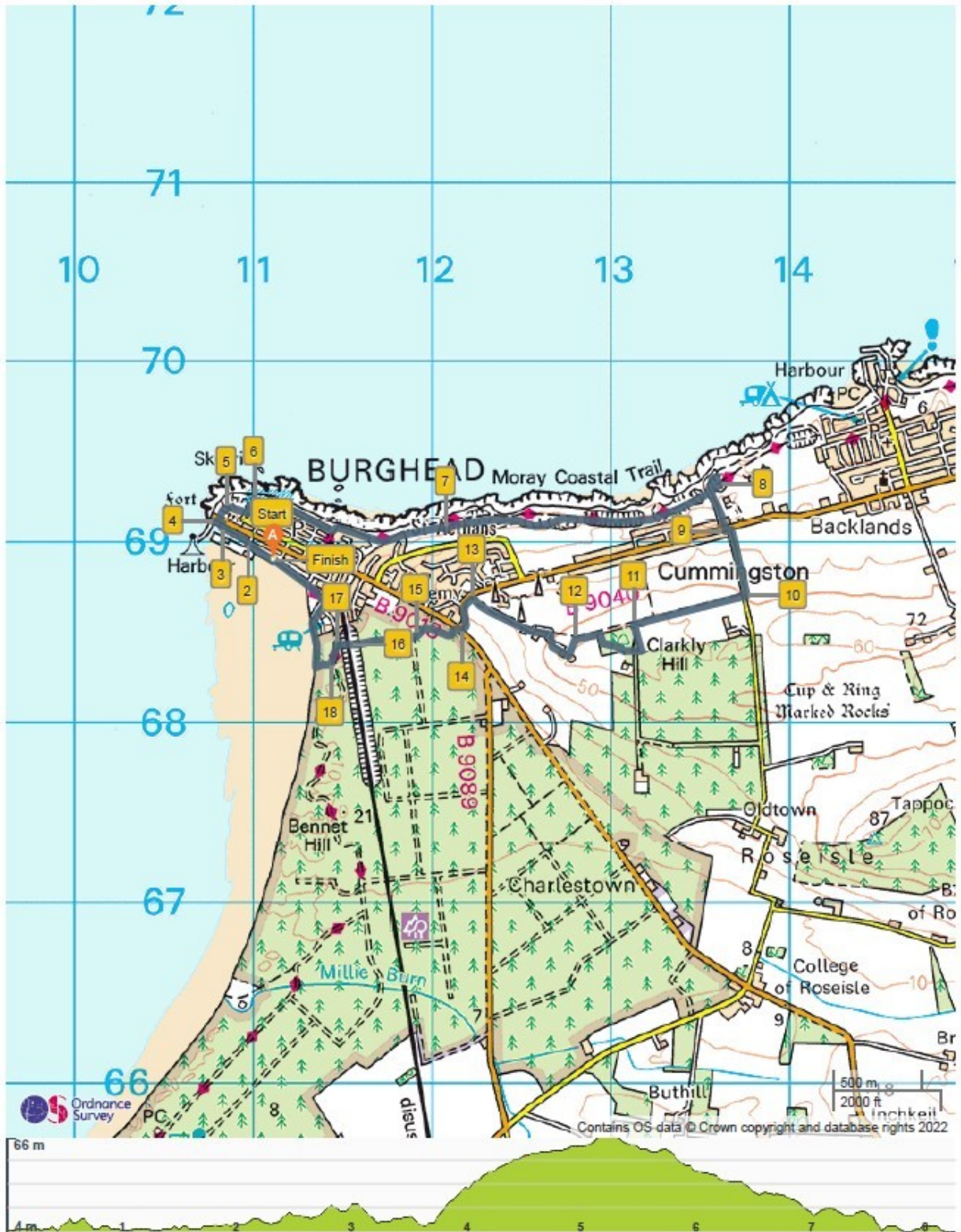
(19) Finish walk back at Station Road car-park

In 840 m from leaving the trees of Roseisle Forest, you will have arrived back at your start-point by the information board at the car-park off Station Road. (8.26 km)



Route Map (with waypoints)

187-Burghead-Cummington-Clarkly Hill Circuit



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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