

The Mack Walks: Short Walks in Scotland Under 10 km

Cullen Bay and Portknockie Circular (Moray)

Route Summary

A great coastal walk taking in old fishing villages and historical buildings alongside the natural beauty of a wide sandy bay and striking rock formations. The route alternates between sea and cliff-top level with a final section in landscaped woodland and farmland.

Duration: 3 hours.



Route Overview

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Transport/Parking: Stagecoach buses from Aberdeen and Elgin pass through Cullen. Check timetables. Free public car-park at start/finish of walk.

Length: 9.670 km / 6.04 mi

Height Gain: 202 meter

Height Loss: 202 meter

Max Height: 54 meter

Min Height: 3 meter

Surface: Moderate. Good paths and paved surfaces. Take care on cliff paths!

Child Friendly: Yes, if children are used to walks of this distance and overall ascent. Take care on cliff-side paths!

Difficulty: Medium.

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

Refreshments: We can recommend "The Fly Cup" cafe in Portknockie, passed on the walk. Options in Cullen.



Description

This is an excellent walk on the scenic Banffshire coast, an area now part of Moray, which enjoys a benign micro-climate, sheltered by the Grampian Mountains. The route offers variety and historical interest, alongside stunning views. Cullen is an attractive large village. It has a long history, having been made a royal burgh around the end of the 12th C. The old village, which ran downhill from Cullen House is long gone. Nowadays, there is a clear distinction between picturesque and colourful Seatown of Cullen, the fishing quarter, nestled into the broad bay, and the grander "New Cullen" rising uphill and inland. These were planned settlements, built in the 1820's, as was the fine harbour, built by Thomas



Telford to take advantage of the opportunities for trade and the booming herring industry. The impressive railway viaducts featuring on the walk served the original Great North of Scotland coastal line from Aberdeen to Elgin. They were saved from demolition after the Beeching cuts of 1964. After skirting the marvellous sweep of Cullen Bay, the route passes Jenny's Well, named after a poor woman in times past who lived in a cave nearby. The well figured in local folk-customs, associated with May Day. After climbing to the Portknockie headland we come upon the focal point on the route - the hugely impressive and photogenic Bow Fiddle Rock - a natural sea arch, so called because it resembles the tip of a fiddle bow. Portknockie has an ancient history, including being the site of a Pictish fort, but its modern development is associated with the herring boom of the 1800s. Making a return to Cullen, with tremendous coastal views over the golf course, the final section of the route enters the very different landscaped woodland of the Seafield Estate, passing the Old Kirk, founded in the 13th-century church, and with glimpses of Cullen House dating from 1543.

Waypoints

(1) Start at car-park opposite the Square

(57.69151; -2.81921)

From the car-park opposite the Square in Cullen, turn right and walk downhill on Seafield Street as it bends left under the old railway viaduct and becomes Bayview Road.



(2) Right and down path to harbour area

(57.69177; -2.82192)

In just over 200 m, before a flat-roofed white building where an un-named road goes down hill on your right, take the footpath downhill veering very slightly to your left. From here make your way to the harbour area at Port Long Road. After checking out the harbour and information boards carry on walking along Port Long Road in a westerly direction. (204 m)



(3) Veer right and cross blue bridge by viaduct

(57.69251; -2.82786)

After 400 m walking along the beach promenade on Port Long Road, veer right to cross a blue bridge over the Burn of Cullen at a scenic spot under the old railway viaduct*. Carry on walking along the edge of the Bay of Cullen, passing the Golf Club building and impressive rock formations. It is up to you whether you walk along the track at the edge of the golf course or on the beach, or on both at various points, as you make your way to the end of the bay where there are low cliffs. (610 m) *Note: the impressive railway viaducts in Cullen served the original Great North of Scotland coastal line from Aberdeen to Elgin. They were saved from demolition after the Beeching cuts of 1968.*



(4) Leave beach and go right under cliffs

(57.69963; -2.84707)

In 1.5 km, where the beach ends, walk through a gap in the rocks and turn right to walk under the low cliffs, soon finding a narrow path along the grassy shore, and keeping left, under the cliffs. (2.1 km)



(5) Jenny's Well

(57.70098; -2.84808)

In 200 m you will arrive at Jenny's Well. From a 19th Century account - Jennie's (or Janet's) Well is named after a 'lunatic' woman who lived in a cave nearby [date unknown]. The well figured in local folk-customs, associated with May Day, and pins and other small articles were placed in and around the well. When you are ready, carry on walking along the coastal path. (2.3km)



(6) Take narrow path to clifftop

(57.70193; -2.84779)

In another 100 m, follow the narrow path away from the stony beach as it ascends to the top of the headland. Turn right at the bench when you reach the top and follow the coastal path along the top of the cliffs. (2.4 km)



(7) Pass Bow Fiddle Rock

(57.70554; -2.85070)

In 700 m from the stony beach at Waypoint 6 you will come upon an information board for the hugely impressive Bow Fiddle Rock* situated below you, in the sea. After taking in the view from various perspectives on the cliff-side, follow the main path towards a car-parking area in front of the first houses of Portknockie village. (3.1 km)

Note: a natural sea arch, so called because it resembles the tip of a fiddle bow.



(8) Leave clifftop area and go right along Patrol Road

(57.70470; -2.85397)

In 200 m from the Bow Fiddle Rock information board, pass the coastal walk sign to enter into the outskirts of Portknockie. Turn right and walk along Patrol Road along the coastal edge of the village. (3.3 km)



(9) Pass Green Castle info board

(57.70451; -2.85729)

In 300 m, check out the information boards for the Green Castle area. The 'Green Castle' is a rocky promontory to your left where wooden fortifications once stood, Pictish and earlier, it is believed. Now carry on along Patrol Road as it bends around to meet Harbour Road above Portknockie Harbour. (3.6 km)



(10) Pass above Portknockie Harbour

(57.70461; -2.86000)

In 100 m, you will join Harbour Road, high above Portknockie Harbour*. There is a memorial to fishermen lost at sea on a grassy knoll to your right. Carry on walking along Harbour Road as it becomes Cliff Terrace and bends up and left to meet Station Road. (3.7 km)



**Note: from "Undiscovered Scotland" - "...Portknockie's harbour is naturally sheltered by the rocky bluff of Green Castle, once a Pictish stronghold. And traces of still earlier Iron Age defences in the area suggest its origins as a port are probably very ancient. But the modern story of Portknockie began in 1677 when a group of fishermen from Cullen moved a little along the coast and started to operate from here. It grew only very slowly over the years, but then expanded rapidly during the herring boom of the 1800s ..."*

See: <https://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/portknockie/portknockie/index.html>

(11) Veer right then left up to High Street

(57.70288; -2.86353)

In 400 m, at the junction of Cliff Terrace with Station Road and Church Street, walk uphill a short distance and veer left to join the High Street. Carry on walking along High Street. When you pass Hill Street on your left you may wish to deviate to the Fly Cup Cafe. Then, carry on to the end of High Street. (4.1 km)



(12) Go right up Bridge Street

(57.70214; -2.85726)

In 400 m, at the end of High Street, go right up Bridge Street for a short distance then go left into the entrance to Seafield Terrace, looking for the blue Cycle Way signs for the old railway line on your right. (4.5 km)



(13) Veer right onto old railway line path

(57.70150; -2.85596)

In 100 m, or so, veer right onto the old railway line path, heading back in the direction of Cullen. (4.6 km)



(14) Sharp left off railway line path

(57.69957; -2.85172)

After 400 m walking along the old railway line path, just after you pass under a bridge, go sharp left and up the embankment. Turn right at the top and follow the path down towards the golf course. There are marvellous views to enjoy here. Keep following the path down to the golf course and then walk alongside the edge of the course, with fairways on your left side. Please take care and give way to golfers if they are playing close to you. Head towards an obvious path ahead of you that rises back up to the level you have just descended from. (5.0 km)



(15) Veer right up golf course path

(57.69707; -2.84743)

In 400 m, soon after crossing a golf course bridge, take the wide and well-maintained golf course path up to higher level. When you reach the top, go left and walk alongside the periphery of the golf holes at this higher level, heading back towards Cullen in the middle distance ahead of you. (5.4 km)



(16) Veer right back up onto old railway line path

(57.69324; -2.84046)

In 800 m, leave the golf course by veering right and slightly uphill to join the old railway line path again where you go left towards Cullen. As you approach the viaduct, look out on your right for the Temple of Pomona, a folly in the grounds of Cullen House. After crossing the viaduct and passing the flagpole on the Old Castle Motte hill on your right above you (you may wish to deviate up the path on your right to the flagpole and viewpoint), carry on walking towards Cullen, with fine views over Seatown, the old fishing quarter. (6.2 km)



(17) Go right and down to North Deskford Street

(57.69100; -2.82379)

In 1 km go right to follow the path down to North Deskford Street. Walk up the street to the junction with Grant Street. If it is a Tuesday or Friday afternoon, when walkers are permitted access to the Seafield Estate, turn right to follow Grant Street through the large gates into the Seafield Estate in order to reach the rear access to the Cullen Old Kirk. At other times of the week walkers must decide whether they are willing to challenge the restricted access limitations or follow our alternative guidance*. (7.2 km)

*Alternative guidance: at the junction between North Deskford Street and Grant Street cross Grant Street and walk up South Deskford Street and continue on when it meets Cathay Terrace. At the junction between Cathay Terrace and Old Church Road go right to walk down Old Church Road, away from the village. Cullen Old Kirk is approximately 1km from the Grant Street junction noted above.



(18) Left before Cullen House for Old Cullen Kirk

(57.68454; -2.82883)

In 1 km, go left off the Seafield Estate access road to follow the path taking you to the rear of Cullen Old Kirk*. Note that just a little ahead of you on your right at this point is Cullen House**. If wishing to view the House please be aware that it is now a private residential complex and it would be respectful to keep your distance from the building. Once through the access door into the church graveyard you will want to take some time to explore the burial ground and perhaps make a guided tour of the church, if open. When you are ready to move on, take Old Church Road, at the front of the building, back towards Cullen. (8.2 km)



*Note: 'At first sight, this appears to be a typical 18th century Scottish country kirk, but it has a much longer history. The church was founded in the 13th-century church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin ...'

See: <https://scotlandschurches.org.uk/church/old-kirk-of-cullen/>

**Note: 'The first mention of the house of Inverculain is made in 1264, but the majority of the present Cullen House dates from 1543. It replaced Findlater Castle as the seat of the Earls of Seafield. In the late 17th century and again in 1711 alterations were made to the castle, and it was remodelled again in 1858 ...'

See: <http://www.stravaiging.com/history/castle/cullen-house> and
<http://portal.historicenvironment.scot/designation/GDL00121>

(19) Left onto Cathay Terrace

(57.68808; -2.81859)

In 1 km from Cullen Old Kirk, go left onto Cathay Terrace and then right onto Seafield Place. When Seafield Place meets Cullen's main street, Seafield Street (A98), go left to walk downhill to the Square and the starting point for the walk at the car-park opposite. (9.2 km)



(20) Finish walk back at car-park opposite the Square

(57.69147; -2.81910)

In 500 m you will have arrived back at the Square in Cullen,
and the starting point for the walk at the car-park opposite.
(9.7 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](#)