

Walks Auchnahannet, Dulnain Bridge to Tullochgorm

1: Tullochgorm to Balnaan

Standing in the field next to the two standing stones of Tullochgorm with its famous fiddle tune association with Strathspey, is as good a place as any to begin exploring the places and their names in the former parish of Cromdale, Inverallan and Advie. These stones erected by some of the earliest inhabitants of the area, long before the coming of Christianity would have looked on the same magnificent view south towards the Monadh Ruigh or Cairngorms. We don't know what they called them or even the language they used, but human nature being what it is, there must have been a name to identify them in conversation. Some of the earliest settlers probably during the Mesolithic period would follow the River Spey and its tributaries upstream from the coast of the Moray Firth or from the passes of Drumochter and Minnigaig to the south. Little archaeological exploration has been done in this area, but later peoples must have found the area agreeable for their needs and settled.

There are several surviving Bronze Age monuments on the lower reaches of the Spey within the parish. From Tullochgorm a path and farm road beside the Strathspey railwayline leads to the main road passing an old cairn. Looking up towards the Brae of Tulloch among the birch trees, the large cairn of Toum surveys the landscape beneath, as it's done for the last 2700-4000 years. Access can be made from the road to Ochnoir and following the tree line north towards Upper Balnacruie and Croft James. At Croft James taking the minor road due north to Balnaan, is the likely route followed by travellers for centuries. Here a bridge replaced a ford or ferry that crossed the River Dulnain. Before reaching the bridge, on the left the large 18th century Clury House is visible through the trees. This was the former home of the Grants of Clury, a cadet branch of Freuchie. A little further on the left within a field are the remains of Cairn Glass, a heavily eroded Bronze Age cairn. Crossing the bridge reaches the main road where the choice is to return the same way or push on to walks two and three.

2: Balnaan to Auchnahannet and Creag Ealrich

Beyond Balnaan the single track road continues in a straight line ever northwards to the farms of Auchnahannet, Clachbain and Rynechra. There are two locations within the parish that bear the name Auchnahannet. Both are early Celtic Christian sites and mean field of the church. The old maps pinpoint a Chapel Well and Howe, though no structural remains are visible. Nothing either is known about the history. Pushing on, the road becomes an untarred track towards Clachbain, leaving the arable land for the broad expanse of moor and rising rugged rocks of Cam Sgriob and Creag an Righ. Clachbain recently come back into habitation, sits by a standing stone of the same name. Seemingly a previous tenant as part of his

tenancy had to paint the stone white. Thankfully it's now returned to its natural condition.

Options from here are: a track through the heather that skirts Cam Sgriob to the east and on to Lochindorb, continue towards Rynechra; or returning to Upper Auchnahannet a track heads west to Rynruich and Rycraggan. Both now in ruins, they are worth visiting as due to their remoteness they have retained many of their original features. Sheep tracks now climb upwards to the watershed at Corrou and the summit of Creag Ealrich. A rocky scree overlooks the road from Carrbridge to Nairn and Forres and according to legend was created by a giant with a strike of his sword. A great vantage point rewards the long walk in, with views stretching for miles.

3: Muckrach, Dulnain Bridge to Skye of Curr

Returning from Auchnahannet and A938 junction follow the road towards Dulnain Bridge. On the left just hidden from view is the fully restored Muckrach Castle. A fine example of a Scottish tower house brought back to life by the architect Ian Begg. Now let to visitors, it can be viewed by following a track from the rear entrance to Muckrach Lodge. Built for a younger son of the Laird of Freuchie, it later fell into ruin as that branch removed to Rothiemurchus, where they remain today. It's not until almost upon the castle, that its strong defensive location can be appreciated. Returning to the main road leads to Dulnain Bridge which until at least the early 20th century was happy to be known as Dulnan. The intrusive 'i' was allegedly imposed by the post office. Turning left past the garage the road climbs past the old limekiln on the Finlarig road. Past lower Finlarig on the left are the remains of Finlarig chapel. Another site of early Christianity in this vicinity. An enclosing wall, possibly marks a cemetery and an outline of a rectangular building, likely the chapel, can still be seen. Views from here are back towards Muckrach Castle and over Clury.

Return through Dulnain Bridge to a circular route via Skye of Curr or Easter Curr. Skye of Curr was founded in 1796 when Sir James Grant offered leases along what was then the main road from Grantown to Aviemore. Strung out along the road many of the original houses and their fields can still be seen, though new builds are encroaching. Passing the Heather Centre back to the main road which on the right returns to Croft James junction or by going left for 250m on the main road, a stile gains access to the old road. The track eventually enters Curr wood and continues behind the quarry to regain the old road before Mid Curr. A detour to the old burial cairn behind Auchendean Lodge is worth a visit before passing Easter Curr where the choice is a footpath through the wood or by the new main road back to Dulnain Bridge.