

A G E n d a

Grampian 50+ Network News for

Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire & Moray



Registered Scottish Charity SC031721

Issue 88
November 2022



Kirk o The Sculls and Gardenstown courtesy of Doug Simpson

Article on page 22

NETWORK news

Discounts:

Various outdoor equipment/clothing retailers are offering discounts to Grampian 50+ members:

Hilltrek: 10% discount . There are two websites – www.hilltrek.co.uk and www.hillgear.scot

If any members wish to order online, they can get a code from Hilltrek Outdoor Clothing, Clachan Yell Workshops, Deeside Activity Park, Dess, Aboyne.

Trespass (including Nevisport:)

Trespass: 15% off all items.

Nevisport: 15% off full price items; 10% off sale goods,

Craigdon: 15% off full price goods

Cotswold Outdoor, Runners Need and Snow & Rock: 12.5% discount in store and online on full price items, excluding electronics and selected items. Valid till end of March 2023. For members' personal use only.

Code: **AF-GRAMNET_M2**. Members will need to be signed up for their free Explore More benefits scheme to use the discount.

Find out more about this at <https://www.cotswoldoutdoor.com/explore-more-benefits.html>



Hi Viz Waistcoats:

We still have some left with 'Ring Bell or Yell' on them. Any group who would like another, please contact Sue.

First come, first served.

New Website: This should be ready by the end of 2022

2023 Programme:

- Spring Fling and AGM in April
- Holiday in Peebles 15 - 19 May
- Ramblers' Rendezvous in late July/ August
- Conference in October/November
- Three issues of the AGENDA

First Aid Courses: are taking place in October and November of this year. If over-subscribed, we will try to offer more early in 2023 if there is demand.

Aberdeen City Trails: Aberdeen City has produced a series of themed trails in the city. Visit the website to see more:

www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/trails or aberdeentrails.

The information is also available in the form of individual booklets which are well worth a look.



Age Scotland is the leading charity representing older people in Scotland and supporting their rights and interests. Their mission is to inspire, involve and empower older people in Scotland and influence others, so that people in Scotland enjoy better later lives.

How do they do that? They offer a wide range of services and resources for older people, including a dedicated Helpline which is a free, confidential service for older people and their families. Their advisors can help older people to understand their rights so they can make informed choices and access appropriate support. It can be tricky to find out what you are due and Age Scotland is running their “Check in, Cash Out” campaign at the moment, whereby their expert benefits team can help you to unlock your entitlements. Call free on 0800 12 44 222

They also offer a wide range of online training and workshops ranging from Energy Advice to Benefits and Dementia Training. The online training is interesting, entertaining and full of valuable information. All the training courses are listed on their website and free! And of course, they still provide a wide range of booklets available to download or you can request hard copies for your group.

To find out how membership of Age Scotland could benefit your group, and all the resources and support that are available, please visit www.agescotland.org.uk

Kay Wood, National Community Development Officer, Age Scotland

Incidents Requiring Medical Assistance:

If an incident occurs when your group is walking away from a tarred road that requires a 999 call, **don't** ask for Ambulance, but ask for Mountain Rescue as they can carry/stretchers to the road; paramedics can't.

Suggest your members register for being able to text 999 if they don't have a strong phone signal.

Registering for the 999 text service:

- o Text the word 'register' to 999 and follow the instructions.
- o Should you have insufficient service to call 999, you can text 999.
- o Downloading the free OS Locate App
- o Used alongside your OS map, this is a fast and highly accurate means of pinpointing your exact location on the map. It has an inbuilt GPS system, so you don't need mobile signal. You will need to switch on your device's location services for this to work

Download the **What3words** app as you may be asked for this by Emergency Services.

Judy Middleton

AUTUMN walks



River Don

Thursday - Persley. Dave Mackay led the walk with Meg, his wife, as back marker. Dave is very knowledgeable about this area of the River Don having worked at Mugiemoos Paper Mill for many years.

With some industrial archaeology!



Left - Mother Earth



Denburn - Maidencraig Walk – Thursday 13th October

A few drop outs so quality not quantity. Jill Fraser stepped in as back marker. Thanks Jill.

The second photo is put in just for fun; we walked past this car advertising artificial grass!



Autumn walks



Family of swans



River Don



Formartine - Buchan Line



The Autumn Walks took place in Aberdeen City this year, with walks in Hazlehead Park and woods, the River Don at Dyce, Den of Maidencraig and Hazlehead Park, and Persley to Seaton Park circular along the River Don.

Many thanks to the Network Committee and to Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire groups who led the walks.

Near Stoneywood

Ramblers' rendezvous - Huntly

It was another great turn out for the Ramblers Rendezvous at Gordon Schools, Huntly on 26th July 2022. Over 200 people were there on the day and included Guests from Age Scotland and AVO (Aberdeen Voluntary Organisation).

Despite the weather being somewhat unsettled, it didn't seem to dampen the enthusiasm of all those who took part in the outside activities. As for inside, all was quiet and productive in the craft rooms or very lively, if you took part in the Bell Ringing session.

Our afternoon sessions drew to an end, with the serving of the most delicious hot pies supplied by Fiona, local Baker and Caterer, (Forest Catering), Dean's shortbread and a refreshing cup of tea or coffee. Special mention to Rab Gunn who stepped up and volunteered his help behind the tea/coffee serving hatch! The last minute, extra pair of hands was very much appreciated, Rab.

On behalf of the Committee, thank you to all Tutors, Leaders and Helpers from Huntly Walking Group, Inch Walking Group, Oldmeldrum Ramblers, Garioch Men's Group and Dyce Thursday/Friday Group for your support both before and throughout the day.

We look forward to seeing you all again soon.

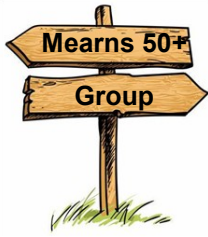
Sue Wright
Secretary







Ramblers' rambles



Possibly the highlight of the past 3 months, for our group, was our 600th walk.



The very first walk done by the Mearns 50+ Group was around Inverbervie, so with that in mind, we started our walk in Gourdon, a mile south, and walked to Inverbervie and back. Then

we all had lunch at the Quayside Fish Restaurant in Gourdon

In March we went round Forfar Loch, then a fortnight later walked around Newtyle, near the Angus/Perthshire border. This particular walk required a lot of detours over or around fallen trees, but it was obvious that work had started on clearing up the damage.



In April a stroll around the Stonehaven area showed us that much of the flood prevention work has now been completed. Also in April, there was a walk in the Balmoral area where we saw several of the many cairns erected by Queen Victoria (not personally!!) in memory of various events and family.

In May, Blairgowrie in Perthshire is well worth a visit to see the Bluebell Woods nearby. If you time it correctly, it is a stunning walk. Then our latest walk was in the Portlethen area where it is always interesting to walk to Downies Village and see the "Spottie Well."

Helen Ritchie - Mearns 50+



Fraserburgh 50+

Lunchtime at the Shakkin Bridge.

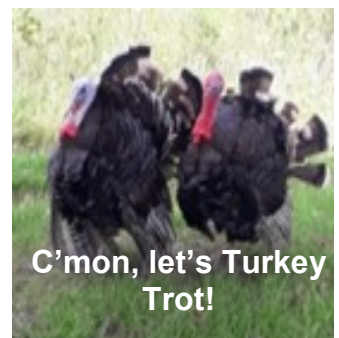
See page 17

"IT'S NOT HOW MANY MILES YOU WALK, IT'S HOW MANY SMILES YOU SHARE."
- Unknown

This saying was forwarded by one of our walkers, Margaret. It made me think - what smiles have we shared while walking this summer?

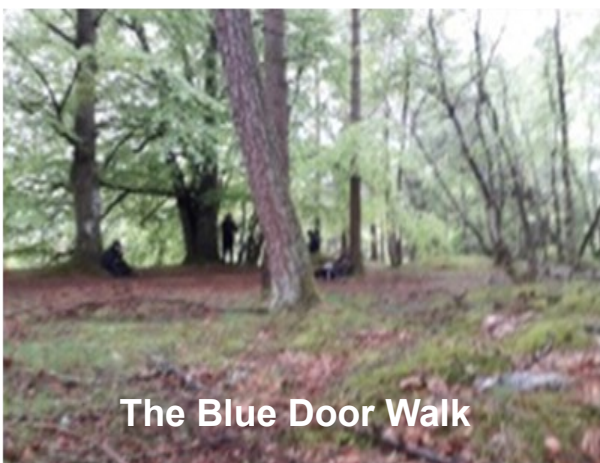


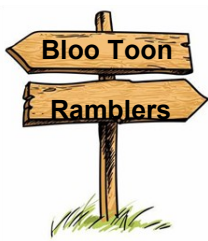
- Smiles when we got back the use of our mini bus with the walks programme now taking us further afield. First walk at Glen Tanar on a beautiful sunny day.
- Smiles to greet new members, delighted they are still smiling at the end of their first group walk.
- Smiles to welcome back a group member returning after ill health, injury or covid isolation.
- Smiles when we did the Seven Bridges at Ballater on the hottest day of the year and got back to the bus, tired, hot and badly in need of some ice cream.
- Smiles, and laughter, when we did the Blue Door Walk on a damp, then very wet, day and had to negotiate fallen trees and obstacles with the rain, and the puddles, increasing while clambering stiles and dripping our way back to the cars. A memorable walk.
- Smiles when we successfully consulted 'Google' for the name of the field full of purple plants (*lacy phacelia*.)
- Smiles when our walk took us to Lunan Bay in the sunshine.
- Smiles at Drumtochty Glen when the farmers spent some time educating us about his three bison, then further up the hill the shepherd continuing our class with copious information about his posh Merino sheep and their splendid wool.
- Smiles when we were enjoying lunch at Fasque Estate, bemused and entertained by a dancing duo of turkeys.



So I would say yes, we have shared LOTS of SMILES while we walked LOTS of MILES!

Betsy Luurtsema - Stonehaven 50+ Group





Over the summer months we have enjoyed some great walks.

On 1st June we did a fairly local walk along the railway line and on to Buthlaw Walk. At times we walked along by the River Ugie, a very good walk not far from Peterhead.

On 15th June, another fine, sunny, day, we travelled to the Logie Buchan area to begin our walk. From this point we walked on farm tracks and quiet country roads to Newburgh. On the way we were able to admire the open countryside, the Ythan estuary and Forvie sands. The walk took us past Knockhall Caste, now a ruin.

Change of weather on 29th June, a dull, wet morning as we headed to new Pitsligo to begin our walk. However, it was not long before the rain went off and the day turned warm and pleasant. We walked on quiet, tarred roads to Strichen where we admired the setting of Strichen Lake before the return journey.

Another very good walk on 13th July when we walked along the old railway line from Newmachar to Logierieve, enjoying the countryside.

A change of direction on 27th July when our walk was from St. Combs, past the golf course and on to Inverallochy/Cairnbulg. Several members then walked back along the beach to St. Combs. Packed lunches were enjoyed in the open air.



On a lovely, sunny, morning on 10th August we travelled to Kemnay area for our summer outing. We walked in Fetternear Estate (picture 1) a great setting, going along various paths with trees on either side.

We saw the Bishop's Palace (picture 2) an archaeological site, as we went along. At times we walked by the River Don. Back in Kemnay, we went to the Kintore Arms for a soup & sandwich lunch, all ready to tuck in after an excellent walk.

On 24th August it rained during our journey to Troup Head and also for a short time during our walk. Then the sun came out and it became warm and sunny. We did a circular route which was uphill and downhill in parts, with great views of lots of gannets and guillemots on the cliffs.

On a very wet morning on 7th September we were heading to Forvie Sands but, by the time we arrived, the sky was turning blue and the rain was clearing! We walked on paths through Forvie, along by the ruin of Forvie Kirk and round by Hackley Bay, with lovely views of the seashore. We walked to Collieston and back to the awaiting bus.

On a fine, warm, sunny morning on 21st September our walk was in the Strathbeg/Ratray area, walking on farm roads and grassy paths. The interesting feature on this walk was a dead whale!

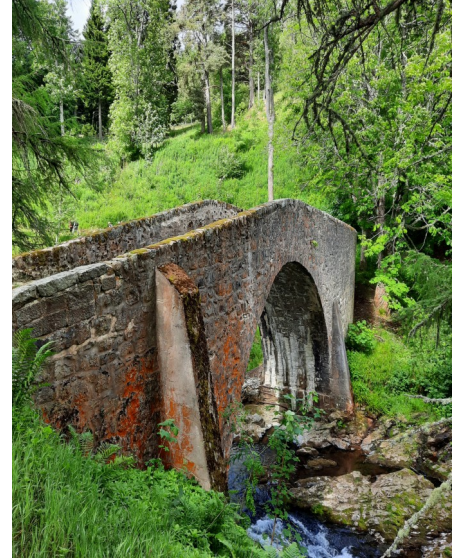




The enjoyment of our regular Monday walks is enhanced by finding out and sharing information about the history and people of the area. Here are some.

In Lumphanan, the information board explains that it is difficult to establish the real facts about Macbeth. Shakespeare didn't help matters! Macbeth was killed in Lumphanan in 1057 "meeting his demise at the hands of Malcolm Canmore (King Malcolm III), the son of Duncan". We visited Macbeth's Well where he drank before his final battle. **(See picture bottom page 15)**

During our walk at Bellabeg we crossed Poldullie Bridge. The bridge, built 1715, was used as a filming location in "Mary Queen of Scots". **(see picture right.)**



Passing the ruined township of Dubrach, on our way to the Chest of Dee, we heard about Peter Grant, known as 'The Dubrach.' He joined the Jacobite cause and fought at Culloden, surviving the battle but was captured and imprisoned in Carlisle Castle. He managed to escape and make his way back to Deeside. He died in 1824, aged 110, the last Culloden Jacobite, and was buried in the graveyard in Braemar.

At Inveraray, there is a monument to commemorate John Lamont, born in 1805 at Corriemulzie (right.) Aged 12, after the death of his father, he was sent to St. James', the Scots Benedictine College in Regensburg, Germany. He proved to be a great scholar who, known as Johann von Lamont, was appointed Astronomer Royal of Bavaria and awarded the Merit of the Bavarian Crown - **see picture bottom page 15.**

Susan Lawson - Ballater 50+

We were treated to coffee and scones at Drum Castle in April **(below left)** by Sandy Glennie. He had donated the money to be spent on a "fly cup" in memory of his wife, Lottie, who had been a stalwart member of the group for over 20 years before her sad death in March 2020 following quite a long illness. Lottie just loved her Friday rambles.

We'd had to delay our treat because of Covid.



Edna Harris - Millbank Ramblers



A beautiful walk at Clova, Lumsden



As with many other groups, for the first time in recent years we've managed a full year programme, with new members enjoying walking with us. This was marred by

the loss of our good friend, Paul Douglas, weel kent frae Dunfermline tae Inverurie via Kemnay. After the service, his good lady remarked that we would not miss his lateness. We will always miss him.

In May we returned to Muir Cottage, where we walked 30 miles over three days, thoroughly enjoyed by all. This superb facility is often available mid-week. In June we had a very interesting day being shown round some of the buildings/facilities linked to Aberdeen Community Heat & Power project. How many high rise buildings are there in Aberdeen? 59 and so far 42 are linked to the system with more to be linked in the future. With similar projects in Tullos and Inverurie, Aberdeen and Shire are at the forefront of community heating and waste, to energy systems.

In July we were happy to support the Ramblers' Rendezvous in Huntly and in August had a visit to Maud Railway Museum where there was so much knowledge and history to interest us.

In September, a group of us helped Garioch/Bennachie ranger, Alison, to clear paths on Gordon Way and around the Mither Tap, a task postponed from two years ago. In October we finally managed a trip to Cabrach, where we had a guided walk at Dornell wind farm courtesy of the Ranger

On our walk in July, the weather changed unexpectedly to rain and wind. Inappropriate clothing, eg jeans, was observed, totally unsuitable for an outdoor long walk in an open area. Very few donned waterproof trousers, which would have provided protection. The choice of footwear for walking on rough paths was also questionable. Most outdoor equipment retailers in Grampian offer 10–15% discount, as well as other offers. One walker recently purchased unused walking shoes for £7 in a charity shop! It is important to BE PREPARED to avoid problems such as hypothermia and so as not to put individuals, groups and emergency services at risk. Even in perfect conditions I carry waterproofs, hat, gloves, etc .

As Alfred Wainwright said, "There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing".

Russ Jacob - Garioch Men's Group

Macbeth's Well



Monument to John Lamont



Showers gave way to sunshine as we walked from Whitehills to Banff in late July, stopping to view the ancient, beehive-shaped Red Well. On the way we spotted some rock-balancing pebble art, amazed at the patience involved. Our break at the Spotty Bag Shop, followed by sandwiches by the sea wall, left time for a walk on the beach and an ice cream. A stroll round Banff Castle gave us great views over Banff and Macduff. A monkey puzzle tree growing there had an abundance of round nuts, each of which contains around 200 edible seeds. Our circular coastal walk finished with a lovely high tea at The Galley in Whitehills.

On a warm, overcast day, a small group of us parked our cars at Aden Park, from which a short walk took us to Old Deer and on to the old railway line, with Saplinbrae and Deer Abbey on our right. A steep climb led to where Aikey Fair used to be held on the last weekend of Aberdeen Trades Fortnight. It was originally a market for selling horses and cattle and hiring men. There was a good path to the top of the hill from which we had great views over to Peterhead Power Station, Boddam and St. Fergus Gas Terminal. We had our break at the standing stones before heading towards Stuartfield, where an ice cream made a lovely treat on a warm afternoon. Easy, off-road paths made a safe route back to Old Deer and Aden Park.

We had a good turnout for our 6 mile walk to Tomnaverie standing stones, Tarland. We were dropped beside Drummy Wood, walked along the main road past Tarland Caravan Park, then crossed on to a grassy path, watched by three white ponies. The countryside was spectacular in the bright sunshine, but, in contrast, behind us the sky and landscape were dark grey and moody. At the top we spotted red kites and four lighter brown birds. Loch Kinord, Mt. Keen and Cairngorm were all in view. Back down into the woods for lunch, after which we carried on to the Standing Stones, passing an eco-friendly house with vegetation covering the roof. Stunning views from the Standing Stones included the beautiful Tarland Church. Then it was down the tracks back to Tarland.

Our six mile walk to Johnston Gardens and Hazlehead Park had a damp start in Ellon, which became a fine drizzle at Johnston Gardens. We walked through the gardens to Hazlehead Park which was looking good after the rain and very quiet, although the paths were busy with dog walkers. The pink and grey granite fountain towered above us, along with the other granite sculptures. The rose garden was beautiful and the soft perfume from the roses after the rain was lovely. Round the perimeter took us back to the café for lunch in the marquee with clear plastic sides. Dining in style for us today! On the way back, we wandered along the paths in Johnston Gardens, noting the blue bridge and the beautiful memorial, which was so serene and perfect for purpose. Some of the leaves were starting to change colour already, probably because it had been so dry.

On a favourite walk to Bridge of Alvah, we entered Wrack Woods through the tall, granite gate posts topped by heavily decorated urns, beautiful in their day. The Mausoleum, with its arched windows, was built in part of a monastery in a peaceful, picturesque location above the River Deveron. The 18th century elaborate iron-work gate was made in Banff foundry. Alas, we saw none of the resident red squirrels. Bridge of Alvah was such a peaceful spot for lunch and, across the open countryside we could see Bennachie. Old milestones are a rarity these days – 1 mile to Banff. Out of the woods we were met with the spectacular view of Banff, its golf course and the road bridge. Down through the distillery, we made our way over the bridge to our bus.



All our walks have been really enjoyable. ***Aileen Taylor - Ellon Ramblers. See right for some pics.***



We began July with a walk part way round wild and wonderful Loch Muick in a strong wind, luckily blowing away from the loch, otherwise we might have

'enjoyed' an unwelcome paddle! As we walked around the loch, it became sheltered, sunny and tranquil. On the way back to the bus, we watched a herd of grazing deer nearby with several stags. The day continued with a really well organised delivery of delicious fish and chips as we arrived in Banchory. Next it was Lossiemouth – a beautiful, coastal, clifftop walk, looking down on lovely little bays and interesting rock formations, descending to the sandy beach as we approached Lossie. From there, to our surprise and delight, we were treated to an amazing display by the Red Arrows!

From Kemnay, we walked along a scenic, minor road above the river to the Shakkin' Brig and then through the woods of Fetternear Estate, taking in the Bishop's Palace, where the Bishops of Aberdeen had their summer residence, on the way. We were nearer home for the next two walks – a clifftop walk along by Crovie to Gardenstown on a beautiful day with wonderful views, and then St Combs/Inverallochy/Fraserburgh, following paths and then along the beach from the Philorth to Fraserburgh.



Later in September, we were back on Deeside in the beautiful grounds of Crathes Castle and along the Walkway to Banchory. Lastly, in a new location for us, in the Craiggellachie/Aberlour area, we had a beautiful walk, much of it in woodland with the changing colours of Autumn, and along by the river with its spectacular falls.

All in all, we have had an amazing variety of walks, all hugely enjoyable and each offering something different – and the weather has always been kind to us.

Chris Ritchie - Fraserburgh 50+



A few snaps from recent Ellon Ramblers walks



We had a varied programme at the Mintlaw Walkers, including our Summer outing to Cullen with a walk round the woods and up the hill behind Cullen, which took in views up and down the coast. However, three walks were new experiences for me. These were walking from Haudagain to Footdee (Fittie), from Tarves to Pitmedden, and The Kemnay Steens.

The first started with the bus dropping the walkers off at the Persley walled garden, where we paused for our morning “fly cup”. The gardens are well laid out, nice and peaceful, and somewhere I thought I must stop and rest after the trauma and perils of the Haudagain roundabout. Then on down the river side as it cuts through a steep sided valley, heavily wooded on each bank, birds flitting through the trees - you could be out in the country rather than on the edge of a city. We saw the remnants of a large mill race beside the river, then we came upon the reason for this in the form of massive wheels that had been part of a mill driven by water from the Don. This led into Seaton Park with its children’s play area, formal flower beds and view of St Machar Cathedral. On then down to the Beach Boulevard, with walkers, runners, strollers and a few bathers. A welcome pause to view the vintage toilets and then on to Footdee and the bus.

Tarves was our starting point as we followed the Old Aberdeen or drovers’ road to Pitmedden on a really warm day. Starting off the path was a proper road, with renovated and modern houses dribbled along it, but at the last one the road changed into a rough steep path going up through the woods, which did provide a welcome cool shade. At the top the path broke out into fields bound by drystone dykes and views across the countryside. An interesting and historic route, you could imagine drovers of old taking their cattle to market. We stopped at Pitmedden House for lunch, picnicking in the cool of the woods, then clambered back onto the bus.

The Kemnay Steens are a new addition spread round Kemnay depicting scenes from its past and its legends - the granite quarries, the market fairs and other events, and the giant of Bennachie. Our walk took us past ponds created from the excavation of old quarries, along the River Don, through housing areas and a park. An interesting walk, with our leader Ian commenting on each of the stones and also sharing bits of history. A case of informative exercise.

We look forward to more walks over the next few months.

Ian Sandison - Mintlaw Walkers

Right - Kemnay Steens



We are all fit and well. A couple of our stalwarts have had the dreaded Covid but have recovered well and are back rambling. Our numbers have shrunk from forty to twenty-two, but what we have is quality rather than quantity.



On my last entry we were on the verge of doing the Alastrean Woods walk at Tarland. A wonderful walk, approx. 5 miles and included the Tomnaverie Stone Circle, dating from 2500 BC; the Sunseat designed by Dave and Simon Power and built by local builder Simon Bullock in 2009; Alastrean House originally named House of Cromar built in 1905 for Lord and Lady McRobert and their sons, renamed Alastrean House after their ill-fated sons and now a care home. At the end of the walk we passed a golf course designed by the famous Tom Morris in 1908 and still showing the old ridge and furrow cultivation. We ended up having a splendid tea/coffee in the Tarland Café.

One of our favourite walks is Hazlehead Circular and Johnstone Gardens particularly at the time we did it in July. Johnstone Gardens, gifted to the City in 1936, has the memorial to the eleven men lost in a helicopter accident in 2009; and Hazlehead Park has the memorial to the dreadful Piper Alpha disaster in 1988. The roses in the garden were at their beautiful best.

Our last walk was at Crathes Castle. A beautiful woodland walk through the historic castle grounds.

We followed the Red Squirrel Trail, The Kingfisher and Heron Trail and the Pine Martin Trail but unfortunately didn't see any squirrels, kingfishers or pine martins. Perhaps better luck next time.



Happy Ramblers at the Sun Seat in Tarland



Kathleen at the beautiful Mill Pond



**Sandy McIntosh -
Oldmeldrum Ramblers**



Our first walk in June was a Logie Coldstone circular which traversed the lower slopes of Morven, and the following week we hiked up to the Queen Mother's cottage at Auchtavan near Inver on the A93. Birdlife included Red Kite, Curlew, Buzzard and Meadow Pipit. In June, on a scorching hot day, we ventured up Strathdon where we walked a Bellabeg/ Bunzeach/Lonach Hall circular. Our last walk that month was in the Bin Forest at Huntly where the wildlife that day was orchids, Ragged Robin, Herb Robert and pesky flies!!

July's walks began with a Pitmedden/Tolquhon Castle circular. It was a lovely, warm day and we found yellow rasps and an invasive species called salmonberry. A circuit of Glen Tanar was our next outing and we actually got right around as Mr Capercaillie was no longer ambushing walkers! Next was a trail from Back o' Bennachie to the Pittodrie curling pond from where we visited the site of the old Bede house. We then found the Pittodrie graveyard which was quite overgrown and had fallen trees in it, but was very interesting. Lastly in July we hiked up to Tom's cairn at Finzean returning via the war memorial. Tea at the farm shop afterwards went down a treat.



August saw us doing a low level trail from the Bennachie Centre, also a hike up to Meikle Tap on the Hill of Fare range - a beautiful day with a few fallen trees to negotiate...great fun! Loch Kinord was next where we ventured up a path above the Vat...More fallen trees but with well trodden paths around them. We made use of the new car park at Clarack. Castle Fraser turbines and obelisk was our last outing this month and we were thrilled to see lots of red kites.

September began with a Logie Coldstone/ Wells of Poldhu/ Roar Hill circular.... Another gorgeous day with superb views. The following week we did a circular from Potarch to shooting greens and Slewdrum. A showery day for a change! However, another damp start for a trek up Mormond hill at Strichen, but the sun eventually appeared giving us amazing views. Our last September walk was Pitmedden/Tolquhon/ Udney Green on a beautiful autumn day.



So that's it until the next report but here's a poignant quote attributed to Charles Dickens - ***Walk and be happy, walk and be healthy. The best way to lengthen out our days is to walk steadily and with a purpose.***

Sheila Carter - Kintore Wanderers



Now we have a bus and driver, it is good to go further afield for our walks.



In May, on a beautiful sunny day, we did Banchory to Crathes Castle, the only disappointment being that the café was closed so no ice cream at the end of our journey. However, after a

quiet word and the promise of an ice cream, our driver took us back into Banchory, where we formed an orderly queue outside the ice cream shop.

Another beautiful sunny day in July found us alighting from the bus for our walk around Footdee, along the boulevard to Bridge of Don and Seaton Park. It's amazing what you see on Aberdeen beach! We certainly felt the heat that day and it was nice to see an ice cream van at the end of our walk, the owner rubbing his hands with glee as he sold us 20 cones.



Julie Dyer - Turriff & Upper Ythan Walking Club



The Kirk o' the Skulls

High on the side of a steep cliff, a little to the west of the village of Gardenstown (popularly known as Gamrie after the parish) lies the ruins of the ancient Church of St John the Evangelist sometimes referred to as the Kirk o' the Skulls. (Skulls)

The present ruin dating back to 1513 is a church of notable size and fairly structurally sound considering the age and exposed location, however we have to return to a much earlier date to learn of its gory history.

In the year 1004 a fleet of Danish warships dropped anchor in Gamrie Bay, they were fleeing after defeat by the Scots at the Battle of Aberlemno in Angus and were running short of much needed supplies. A raiding party of 600 men were landed near where Gamrie is now located and proceeded to make their way inland. After successfully rounding up cattle and other farm animals for slaughter they were driving them back to the where the waiting fleet lay. On their return to the Gamrie shore however they were met with the fearsome sight of a large Scottish army under the leadership of Mermene, Mormaer of Buchan, looking down on them from the Castle Hill high above the beach. Rather than risking exposing themselves on the beach, the Norsemen instead made their way west to Mhor Head and took up a defensive position near where the church now stands. Mermene, knowing his army consisted of many untrained men was unsure if he could defeat the Danes and appealed for divine help, declaring that if his army were to defeat the Danes he would erect a church to St John on the position they were encamped. The Scots army, growing daily in strength and confidence, drove the Danish raiders up on to Mhor Head itself where the final battle took place. The Scots Army commenced battle by rolling massive boulders down the cliff at the point where the defenceless Danes were gathered, and it is said even the women took part, filling stockings with stones and hurling them down at their unfortunate adversaries. Finally, there on that bleak rocky headland, the Danes were put to the sword and violently slaughtered to a man. Following the victory, the Scots threw the slain bodies into natural crevices on the headland where they were preyed upon by wolves and other wild animals, leading to the encounter becoming known as the "Battle of the Bloody Pits" Mormene, Mormaer of Buchan true to his word built his church, and as a macabre memorial to the battle, the skulls of 3 Danish Generals were selected from the battlefield and built into a niche in the wall near the pulpit. There they remained over the centuries and even when the new church was built in 1513 they were transferred and built into the wall in the new church in a similar position as before. In time this led to the church gaining the sinister sounding name of "The Kirk o' the Skulls."

In 1832 a visitor recorded "I have seen the skulls of Norsemen grinning horrid and hollow in the wall where they have been fixed directly east of the pulpit"

In 1830, following the building of a new parish church closer to the village, the Kirk o' the Skulls was abandoned and fell into disrepair, two of the skulls were subsequently stolen and the third taken to the museum in Banff.

Although there are no longer skulls to be seen, the Kirk o' the Skulls still makes a memorable visit and it is surrounded by a well kept ancient churchyard with headstones dating back to the 17th Century.

It is well signposted on the B9031 Rosehearty to Macduff road about a mile west of the turnoff to Gardenstown. Alternatively it can be accessed by walking the length of the beach to the west of Gardenstown village and climbing the steep path upwards. This would have been the route taken by funeral corteges in days gone by.

Several of our planned walks had to be changed or cancelled, due to weather, road works and gale damage, so I've paraphrased our outings in rhyme – with some Doric thrown in!

At the end o June, we walked fae Potarch
And did the Slewdrum Forest Loop.
It was challenging to say the least
But we managed. Whoop-di-whoop!

Camperdown Park and Templeton Woods
In Dundee was mair o a wander.
Despite 2 murders mair than 40 years syne,
It's a great place tae gang for a dander.

Fae Inverkeilor tae Lunan Bay
An doon tae that marvelous beach.
I love all that sand and wide open space:
It's a pity it's quite hard to reach.

Next, up Glenesk, tae Loch Lee or Queen's
Well,
The latter is shaped like a crown.
But a walk tae the loch wi its ruined kirk
Will cheer ye up and get rid o your frown!

In September we went to Eliot near Arbroath
And walked tae Arbirlot fae there,
Along a path by the water's edge.
If there's coos there, just take care.

Tae Glen
Doll, beyond Glen Clova is a lang twisty drive
Wi bonny views tae see
But it's worth it time and time again
On a bonny day, just to see Corrie Fee.

Helen Ritchie - Mearns 50+ Group

SPOTLIGHT ON

My interest in painting started when I took part in my first Rendezvous in 2016.



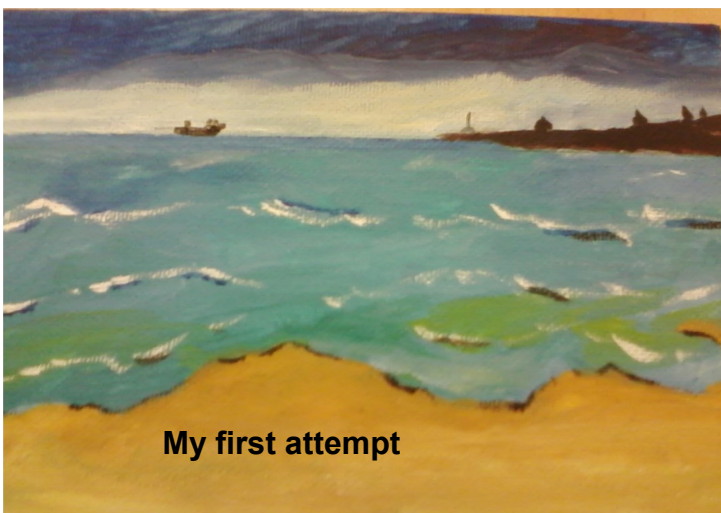
I had chosen acrylic painting as one of my choices and by good luck I was given my first choice. I was over eighty and had never had a paintbrush in my hand before. An artist called Alice Stuart from Aberdeen took the class and was very helpful and encouraging, and I loved it.

My daughter and son in law were so interested in my 'achievement' that she bought an acrylic paint set and we three started filling in bleak Sunday afternoons in Aberdeen by having a go at painting/trying to copy pictures, etc.

We still do this, and with encouragement from Dot, another of my walking group, Wayfarers, Peterhead, I joined an art class at Peterhead Community Centre which meets every Thursday evening during the winter months. There is no pressure, just enjoyment, companionship and helpful advice. I must impress I am just an amateur and do it only for fun - **see examples below**

Looking back, that random choice at the Rendezvous has given an elderly lady a new and enjoyable activity which costs very little and has meant meeting new friends with similar approaches to life.

Barbara Wood - Peterhead Wayfarers



My first attempt



A later work

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Kirk o the Sculls - see article on page 22